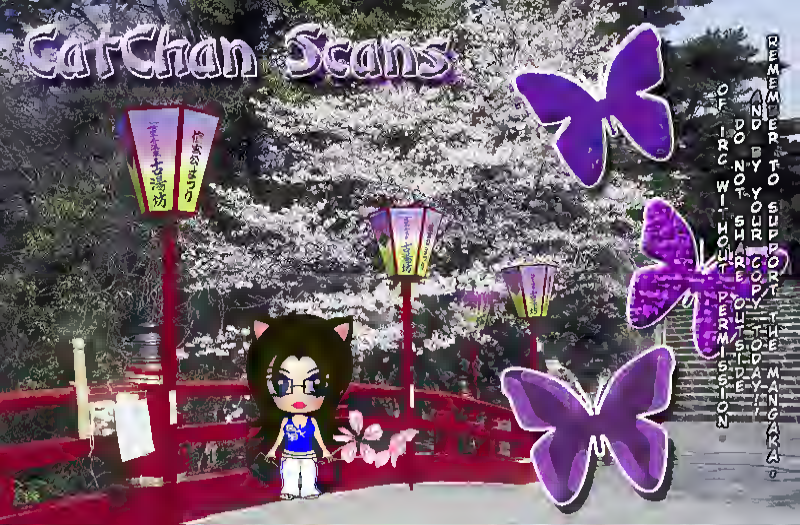
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crossroad

Story & Art by

SHIOKO MIZUKI

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Story and art by
Shioko Mizuki

Volume 1

go!comi

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crossroad

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Concerning Honorifics

At Go! Comi, we do our best to ensure that our translations read seamlessly in English while respecting the original Japanese language and culture. To this end, the original honorifics (the suffixes found at the end of characters' names) remain intact. In Japan, where politeness and formality are more integrated into every aspect of the language, honorifics give a better understanding of character relationships. They can be used to indicate both respect and affection. Whether a person addresses someone by first name or last name also indicates how close their relationship is.

Here are some of the honorific you might encounter in reading this book:

-san: This is the most common and neutral of honorifics. The polite way to address someone you're not on close terms with is to use "-san." It's kind of like Mr. or Ms., except you can use "-san" with first names as easily as family names.

-chan: Used for friendly familiarity, mostly applied towards young girls. "-chan" also carries a connotation of cuteness with it, so it is frequently used with nicknames towards both boys and girls (such as 'Na-chan' for "Natsu").

-kun: Like "-chan," it's an informal suffix for friends and classmates, only "-kun" is usually associated with boys. It can also be used in a professional environment by someone addressing a subordinate.

-sama: Indicates a great deal of respect or admiration.

Sempai: In school, "sempai" is used to refer to an upperclassman or club leader. It can also be used in the workplace by a new employee to address a mentor or staff member with seniority.

Sensei: Teachers, doctors, writers or any master of a trade are referred to as "sensei." When addressing a manga creator, the polite thing to do is attach "-sensei" to the manga-ka's name (as in Mizuki-sensei).

Oniisan: This is the more casual term for an older brother. Usually you'll see it with an honorific attached, such as 'oniisan-chan.'

Onee-: The casual term for older sister, it's used like "oniisan" with honorifics.

[blank]: Not using an honorific when addressing someone indicates that the speaker has permission to speak intimately with the other person. This relationship is usually reserved for close friends and family.

For more information on what honorifics reveal about the characters in Crossroad, check out the translator's notes at the back of the book.

1 In the Wind

I USED TO WRITE HIM LETTERS ABOUT WHAT I DID EVERYDAY...
Dear natsu,
How are you?
...BUT ONE DAY HE STOPPED RESPONDING.
AND SO MY LETTERS BECAME A DIARY.
Has anything got you down?

#1 In the Wind

crossroad Chapter 1: In the Wind

GRANNY!

I'M OFF TO SCHOOL!

I LEFT BREAKFAST OUT FOR YOU.

BE SURE TO EAT IT!

I ALSO PUT OUT YOUR INSURANCE CARD FOR WHEN YOU GO TO THE DOCTOR'S.

ARE YOU STILL NOT FEELING WELL?

GRANNY? ARE YOU ASLEEP?

GRA...

Dear Natsu How are you?

chirp chirp

It's getting colder and colder these days. Looks like winter, not that far off.

Granny hasn't been feeling too well lately

IT SURE IS CHILLY...

We've been studying Haiku at school this week. We covered Santoka last time. Do you like Haiku

What do I seek and where do I go?

Inquiring and walking in the wind

Santoka

What do I seek and where do I go?

Inquiring and walking in the wind

YOU GUYS WERE JUST MY MOTHER'S TEACHERS EVEN THOUGH WE'RE NOT FAMILY, YOU LET GRANNY AND ME STAY HERE...
BUT I'M *FIFTEEN* NOW I'LL BE FINE...
I'M SO GRATEFUL FOR ALL YOU'VE DONE.
THANKS ANYWAY, BUT IT'S TIME TO MOVE ON.
YOU'VE DONE SO MUCH ALREADY.
YOU'RE FREE TO STAY UNTIL YOU FIND A NEW PLACE...

I WOULDN'T KNOW WHERE TO FIND HER.
Matter-of-factly
CAN'T YOU GO BACK TO LIVING WITH YOUR MOTHER, DEAR?

NO THANK YOU.
THE ONLY MESSAGES I EVER GET FROM HER SAY SOMETHING LIKE, "THIS GUY IS THE ONE, I KNOW IT!"
SHE UPS AND MOVES EVERY TIME SHE MEETS A NEW MAN SHE LIKES.

ALL RIGHT, KAJITSU-CHAN
WE'LL BE HEADING HOME NOW
WHO WAS IT THAT SAID, "THAT DAY WILL FINALLY COME"?
GRA...
GRANNY...?
YES, I KNOW I'LL START PACKING UP GRANNY'S THINGS RIGHT AWAY.
ABOUT WHAT WE WERE SAYING...

THANKS FOR PUTTING THE TWO OF US UP FOR AS LONG AS YOU DID...
I'LL BE OUT OF HERE BY THE END OF THE WEEK

クロスロード① +crossroad+

Part 1

Hajimemashite and Konnichiwa! My name is Mizuki Shioka. To all those who are reading me for the first time, and to those of you who have seen my work before, welcome!

Okay then, down to business. Welcome to CROSSROAD. It's my first family drama series. Well, it isn't officially a series yet, seeing as it's just the FIRST volume. But whatever, let's not sweat the details! It's the first--That's all you need to know!

I've always thought about how I wanted to draw a sibling ensemble, but it seemed like such a difficult genre, I've been avoiding it until now. And look! It's taken FIVE years since I first thought of it for the debut to come out! I feel like a girlfriend who's been dating her man for years and is thinking, "Uh, shouldn't we have tied the knot by now?" and then finally decides to put her foot down and propose! But it still is difficult, and oftentimes, I find myself frustrated while in the middle of drawing. I curse my own weakness, and even when my shoulders are aching, I just keep on drawing! Thus, it has finally become a full-fledged manga, and I had the chance to meet all of you, so I guess in the end, it was a success! Yup!

Oh, but that doesn't mean it's over yet! After all, we just dove in

This way to Part 2...

I DIDN'T NEED PARENTS...

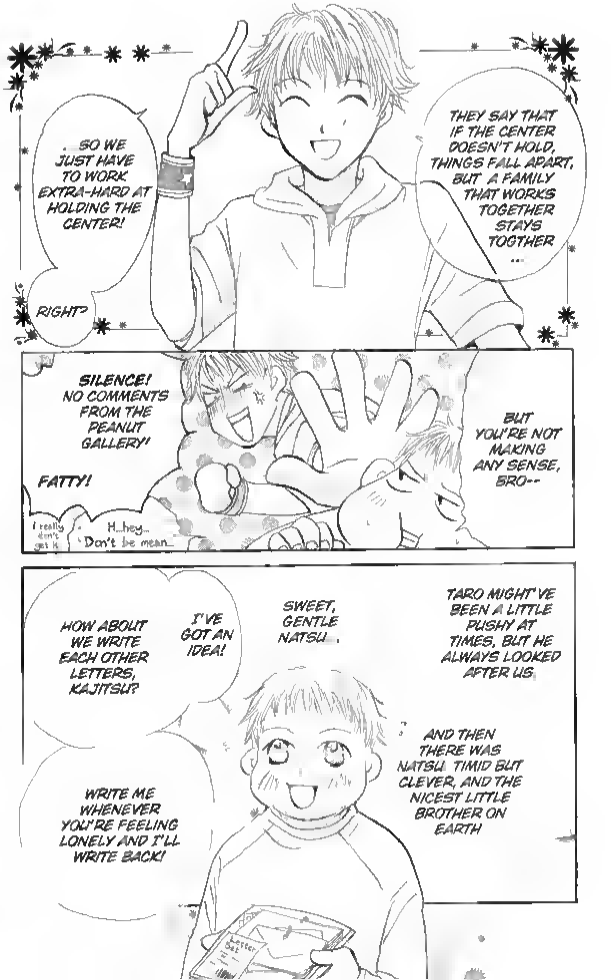
I WAS SIX YEARS OLD WHEN I MET THEM—STEP-KIDS FROM MOM'S SECOND HUSBAND.

ALL I NEEDED WAS GRANNY AND MY TWO "BROTHERS."

JUST BECAUSE WE'RE MOVING APART DOESN'T MEAN WE'RE NOT STILL SIBLINGS
DON'T CRY, KAJITSU!
BUT IT WAS ONLY TWO YEARS BEFORE MY SECOND DAD DUMPED MOM AND LEFT HER WITH THE KIDS.
SINCE MOM COULDN'T TAKE CARE OF US ALL, WE ENDED UP GOING INTO DIFFERENT HOMES.
BUT WE'RE NOT REALLY SIBLINGS, ANYWAY!
NONE OF US ARE RELATED BY BLOOD!
SHEESH! KNOCK IT OFF!
IT DOESN'T MATTER IF WE'RE RELATED BY BLOOD OR LIVE TOGETHER
WAAH!!
IF WE'RE NOT LIVING TOGETHER, THEN WE CAN'T BE SIBLINGS!
Even I know that!!

NATSU AND TARO...
Maybe snakes were a bit much bro.
Aw... we weren't teasing her or nothin
Now, now it's not nice to tease girls
Waah! Granny, granny!
NO WAY! SO YOU'RE NOT RELATED TO THAT WOMAN THROUGH BLOOD?
NOPE
I DON'T HAVE A REAL MOMMY DADDY LEFT ME WITH THIS MOMMY WHEN HE GOT A NEW GIRLFRIEND
THAT SOUNDS LIKE OUR STORY! OUR PARENTS SPLIT UP, TOO
YUP! US STEP-KIDS GOTTA STICK TOGETHER, EVEN IF WE DON'T HAVE THE SAME PARENTS.
...AND MY FIRST BROTHERS.
THEY WERE MY FIRST REAL FRIENDS...

AND JUST AS HE'D PROMISED, NATSU NEVER FAILED TO WRITE BACK A RESPONSE
UNTIL THE DAY.
..I WROTE HIM THE LETTER.
...THAT HURT HIM SO BADLY.
AND THEN YOU WRITE BACK TO ME AGAIN!
I'LL ALWAYS WRITE YOU, I PROMISE!
BRR
IT'S SO COLD..
SHIVER
HM?
I'D BETTER HEAD BACK INSIDE--
'KAY.

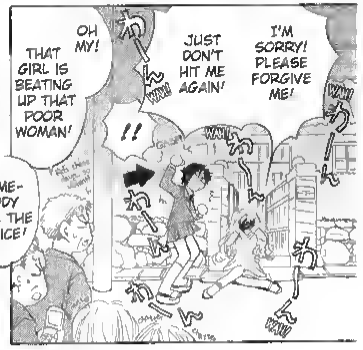

..SO WE JUST HAVE TO WORK EXTRA-HARD AT HOLDING THE CENTER!
RIGHT?
THEY SAY THAT IF THE CENTER DOESN'T HOLD, THINGS FALL APART, BUT A FAMILY THAT WORKS TOGETHER STAYS TOGTHER ...
SILENCE! NO COMMENTS FROM THE PEANUT GALLERY!
FATTY!
BUT YOU'RE NOT MAKING ANY SENSE, BRO--
I really don't get it
H...hey...
Don't be mean...
HOW ABOUT WE WRITE EACH OTHER LETTERS, KAJITSU?
I'VE GOT AN IDEA!
SWEET, GENTLE NATSU...
TARO MIGHT'VE BEEN A LITTLE PUSHY AT TIMES, BUT HE ALWAYS LOOKED AFTER US.
AND THEN THERE WAS NATSU. TIMID BUT CLEVER, AND THE NICEST LITTLE BROTHER ON EARTH
WRITE ME WHENEVER YOU'RE FEELING LONELY AND I'LL WRITE BACK!

EEEEK! WHAT HAVE YOU DONE!? MY NOSE! MY PRECIOUS NOSE!
SLAM!
roll
roll
POW
ボッ
HIYA!
THAT...
huff
huff
huff
huff
ONE WHOLE YEAR WITHOUT SO MUCH AS A "HOW ARE YOU"!? WHERE THE HELL HAVE YOU BEEN...
THAT REALLY HURT, YOU KNO--

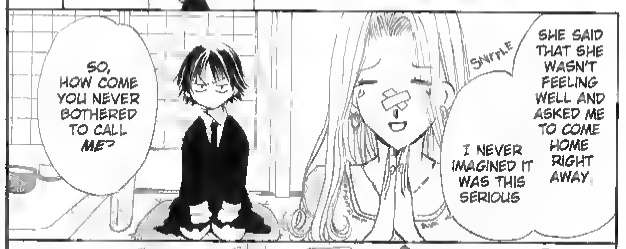
THAT IDIOT!
OH, PLEASE, NO.
RUSTLE
ひゅん
HUH?
IT'S PITCH BLACK OVER THERE! I CAN'T SEE A THING!
MAYBE NO ONE'S HOME...

...MOTHER!?
CAN IT, YOU BIG CRYBABY! I ASKED YOU WHERE YOU'VE BEEN!
QUICK! CALL A DOCTOR! THE PAIN!
EEK!
ACK! MY NOSE IS BLEEDING!
I should have sold you when I had the chance!
EEK!
EEK!

OKAY
YOU'RE PROBABLY RIGHT
C-C'MON WE'D BETTER TALK INSIDE THE HOUSE
ROLL
shuffle shuffle


OH MY!
THAT GIRL IS BEATING UP THAT POOR WOMAN!
SOMEBODY CALL THE POLICE!
!!
JUST DON'T HIT ME AGAIN!
I'M SORRY! PLEASE FORGIVE ME!

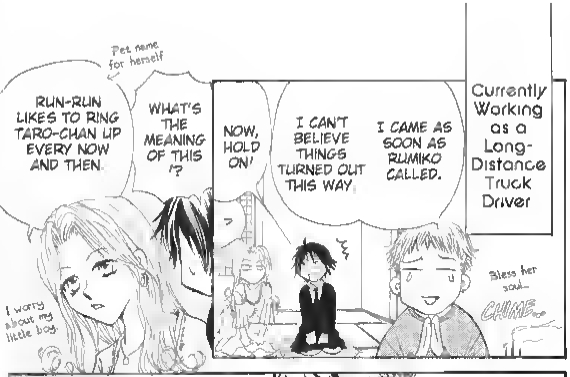
Good-for-Nothing Mother
RUMIKO (28)
Recently Returned
I need some ice
IF I GET A BRUISE, YOU'RE IN BIG TROUBLE, KAJITSU! NOW, WHERE'S GRANNY?
I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU'D HIT YOUR OWN MOTHER!
Damn that woman!
THIS IS ALL SO SUDDEN.
I SPOKE TO GRANNY ON THE PHONE JUST LAST WEEK!
CLICK


SO, HOW COME YOU NEVER BOTHERED TO CALL ME?
SHUFFLE
SHE SAID THAT SHE WASN'T FEELING WELL AND ASKED ME TO COME HOME RIGHT AWAY.
I NEVER IMAGINED IT WAS THIS SERIOUS

WATCH YOUR MOUTH, WOMAN...
BECAUSE YOU ARE A SCARY LITTLE MONSTER!

ARE YOU ALL RIGHT!?
I... I'M SORRY!
WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON IN HERE?
YOU GOT HERE SOONER THAN I EXPECTED.
...TARO-CHAN.
AND YOU MUST BE...
HUH...?

RATTLE
EEEK!
Save me!
...OR I'LL THROW YOU OUT JUST LIKE ALL THOSE OTHER MEN!
HEY, EVERY--
FLING!
SHUNK
--ONE?
AH...
Oop?
YEAH, THAT KINDA HURTS...



Currently Working as a Long-Distance Truck Driver

I CAME AS SOON AS RUMIKO CALLED.

I CAN'T BELIEVE THINGS TURNED OUT THIS WAY.

NOW, HOLD ON!

WHAT'S THE MEANING OF THIS!?

Pet name for herself

RUN-RUN LIKES TO RING TARO-CHAN UP EVERY NOW AND THEN.

I worry about my little boy.

Bless her soul...

CHIME...

AND YOU CAN'T BE BOTHERED TO CALL UP YOUR OWN *DAUGHTER*!?

Are men the only thing you think about?

S... Stay back!

THAT'S BECAUSE YOU'RE SO SCARY!

I OWE YOU AN APPOLOGY TOO, KAJITSU, FOR NOT KEEPING IN TOUCH

Gah ha ha!

I HAVEN'T HAD A STEADY ADDRESS SINCE I GRADUATED FROM MIDDLE SCHOOL

THE APPLE DOESN'T FALL FAR FROM THE TREE...

I'll go make more tea.

Can you make Mushi tea thn time?

Aw Bue Run-Run doesn't like it!

EH...?

...KAJITSU, RIGHT?

I COULD TELL RIGHT AWAY.

WOW, YOU'VE GOTTEN BIG!

UH...

ONII-CHAN? IT CAN'T BE...

poke

YOU'RE SO *OLD*...

Yowch!

WHAT DID YOU SAY!?

Care to try that again?

I'M ONLY *20*, I'LL HAVE YOU KNOW!

IT'S REALLY HIM!

Older Brother TARO (20) Absent for 7 Years

HUH?
SORRY, BUT I NEED TO GO PACK GRANNY'S THINGS NOW.
I HAVE TO BE OUT OF HERE BY THE END OF THE WEEK
A WEEK? SO SOON?
YOU'RE THE ONE WHO MADE THAT DEAL WITH YOUR OLD TEACHERS FOR US TO STAY HERE, REMEMBER!?
OH, YEAH! MY BAD!
SLAM!
WHAT'S WITH HER?
THERE'S NO WAY NATSU WOULD WANT TO SEE ME.
I'M SURE OF IT.

BY THE WAY, KAJITSU...
...NATSU'S ON HIS WAY HERE, TOO
IT'S BEEN FOREVER SINCE YOU TWO HAVE SEEN EACH OTHER, HUH?
I DON'T REMEMBER WHAT TIME HE SAID HE'D GET HERE, THOUGH.
CAN'T BLAME YOU, SEEING AS YOU LIVE SO FAR APART
NO...

NATSU...

BA-DUM

...HOW ARE YOU ——?

CHATTER

NATSU ..

Natsu
Are you doing well?

BA-DUM

NATSU.....

STAGGER

BA-DUM

DID SHE AND NATSU HAVE A FIGHT?

BEATS ME THEY HAVEN'T SEEN EACH OTHER IN AGES.

And it's not like she'd tell me.

NATSU...

I KEPT WRITING YOU LONG AFTER YOU STOPPED WRITING BACK

I NEVER SENT THOSE LETTERS, THOUGH.

I JUST LIKED TO IMAGINE THAT YOU WERE HAPPY, EVEN IF YOU HATED ME

MY ONE AND ONLY LITTLE BROTHER.

YOUR NAME WAS THE ONLY ONE IN THE ENTIRE WORLD...

Dear Natsu,
How have you been?

Natsu

Natsu

Dear Natsu,
How are you?

Natsu

...THAT I COULD WRITE TO.

EVEN AFTER MY LETTERS BECAME DIARY ENTRIES, I WOULD STILL ADDRESS THEM TO YOU

Natsu, did you gain a weight a gain?

NATSU.....
Natsu
Natsu
Natsu
Natsu
Natsu
Natsu
NATSU.....
NATSU...?
CRACK
NATSU.....

HERE'S A TOWEL, NA-CHAN!
WHAT ARE YOU TWO DOING OVER THERE?
Hey!
SHF

LET'S GO...
COME ON, KAJITSU...

YOU'RE NATSU...
DIFFERENT ABOUT HIM NOW
THERE'S SOME-THING VERY...
...RIGHT?

Not the Yakuza, Granny!
LISTEN UP, KAJITSU! I'VE GOT SOME BIG NEWS!
I'M A DELIVERY GUY! THEY PAY ME TO DRIVE AROUND ALL DAY. COOL, HUH?
I FOUND A PLACE FOR US TO STAY!
HUH?
SO, TARO, WHAT DO YOU DO NOW?
Did you join the Yakuza?
Hey!

YOU AND KAJITSU ARE ON THE FAMILY REGISTER. I'D NEVER LEAVE YOU BEHIND.
BUT DON'T WORRY.
ONLY UNTIL YOU FIND A PLACE OF YOUR OWN. IT'S NOT PERMANENT.
It's over the minute you find your next sugar daddy.
Hey!
TARO-CHAN SAID WE CAN ALL LIVE TOGETHER AT HIS PLACE!

Wanna bite of my baked yam?
IT'S REALLY HIM
Younger Brother Natsu Reunited after 7 Years
NATSU...

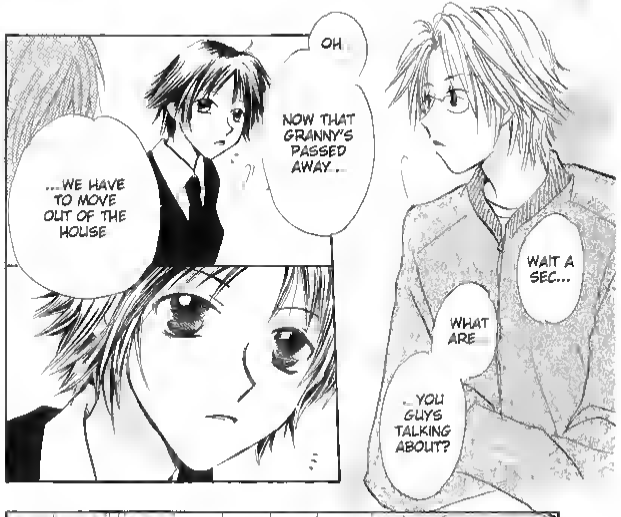
I CAN'T BELIEVE SHE'S REALLY GONE
Poor thing...
Yup, yup...
Poor Granny

AND AS FOR KAJITSU...
Gulp!
AND YOU'RE LOOKING AS YOUNG AS EVER, RUMIKO-SAN
IT APPEARS YOU'VE REALLY EMBRACED THE SLACKER LIFESTYLE, TARO

NATSU SEEMS LIKE A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT PERSON
I KNEW IT WAS HER FROM A MILE AWAY...
TELL ME ABOUT IT!
SHE HASN'T CHANGED A BIT, HAS SHE?

I GOT A CALL FROM GRANNY AT LEAST A MONTH AGO
SHE SAID I WAS WELCOME TO COME AND STAY WHENEVER I WANTED
YOU WHAT!?
YOU'RE TELLING ME YOU ALREADY PACKED UP ALL YOUR THINGS BECAUSE YOU THOUGHT YOU WERE MOVING IN HERE?!
PLEASE CALM DOWN
YOU'RE THE ONE WHO SHOULD BE PANICKING RIGHT NOW!
I CAN'T GO BACK
THEY WERE TRANS-FERRED TO CANADA
NO! WE'RE PACKING UP YOUR THINGS AND SENDING YOU BACK TO YOUR FOSTER PARENTS!

THAT'S WHY I'M HERE.
I DIDN'T WANT TO LEAVE JAPAN WITH THEM AND I HAD NOWHERE ELSE TO TURN.
Getting some fresh air
huff
huff
huff
Could you PLEASE show a little more emotion than that for MY sake?


OH...
NOW THAT GRANNY'S PASSED AWAY...
...WE HAVE TO MOVE OUT OF THE HOUSE
WAIT A SEC...
WHAT ARE...
...YOU GUYS TALKING ABOUT?

...YOU'VE GOT TO BE KIDDING ME.

THIS DAY FEELS LIKE ONE LONG STORM
IN THE WIND
SIGH
PLOP
...NOT BEING ALONE ANY-MORE
...BUT I WOULDN'T MIND...
BECOME A FAMILY AGAIN...?
I'M SURE IT WOULDN'T BE EASY..
"WHAT DO I SEEK AND WHERE DO I GO?
INQUIRING AND WALKING IN THE WIND."
whisper
I GUESS THIS IS WHAT HE MEANT

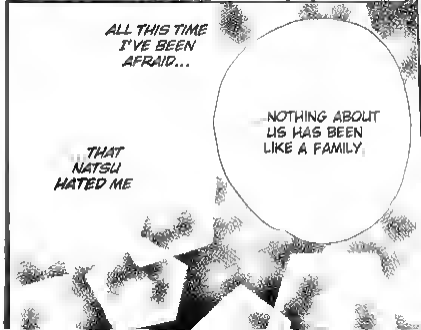
IS THAT SANTOKA?

SO... DO YOU THINK I COULD--
SO YOU'RE TELLING ME THAT EVERYONE HERE...
...IS HOMELESS ?!!
YOU BETCHA! LOOKS LIKE IT, YUP! ♡
Whee!

ISN'T IT JUST THE WEIRDEST? IT'S ALMOST LIKE GRANNY LED ALL OF US HERE FOR A REASON!
MAYBE SHE WAS HOPING WE'D FORM A FAMILY AGAIN!
AT MY PLACE!? I'M THE POOREST ONE HERE! GET YOUR HEAD OUT OF THE CLOUDS, RUMIKO!
Damn that woman! Even if we are legally related!!

I'M NOT INTERESTED IN MAKING FRIENDS WITH YOU.
AND I'D LIKE TO KEEP IT THAT WAY.

"BECOME A FAMILY AGAIN"? WHAT A JOKE.
WE WERE ALL STRANGERS FROM THE START.
FROM THE START...


ALL THIS TIME I'VE BEEN AFRAID...
...NOTHING ABOUT US HAS BEEN LIKE A FAMILY.
...THAT NATSU HATED ME

I'M LEAVING AS SOON AS I FIND A PLACE TO LIVE.
AND THEN YOU'LL PROBABLY NEVER SEE ME AGAIN.

MAYBE...
...OH.
Y-YES

...NATSU ISN'T WORRIED ABOUT THE LETTER.
.. NEARLY AS MUCH AS I AM.

SORRY, BUT NO THANKS

MAYBE HE FORGOT ALL ABOUT IT.
...I HOPE WE HAVE A FUN TIME LIVING TOGETHER FROM NOW ON!
UH... B-BY THE WAY! I KNOW THIS IS SORT OF AWKWARD, BUT...

BUT... IT LOOKS LIKE I WAS WRONG.
YES, YOU'RE RIGHT. A "FAMILY" IS NOTHING BUT AN ILLUSION
WE'VE ALL BEEN ALONE...
...FROM THE START.
The Next Day
HE'S JUST INDIFFERENT TOWARD ME.
THAT'S ALL
STOMP STOMP STOMP STOMP STOMP STOMP STOMP STOMP STOMP STOMP
HUH?
SLAM!
WHERE'S MOM?!
YOU COULD AT LEAST START OFF WITH A "GOOD MORNING"
AND SHE'S NOT IN RIGHT NOW.
DAMN HER!
RUMIKO HAS...
...RUN OFF AGAIN!!
Good-bye Letter
Sorry Run Runs off to Venezuela with Johnny the man of my dreams
Hope you all get along nicely
With love, Everyone's Mommy Rumiko
WHAAAT!? WE'VE BEEN HAD!
I THOUGHT IT WAS SUSPICIOUS WHEN SHE MADE BREAKFAST FOR ALL OF US!
SHE'S NOT COMING BACK? THEN WHO'S THIS LITTLE GIRL...
...EATING BREAKFAST WITH US?
SIT
ちょん。
Oh Got...
I'VE GOT A BAD FEELING ABOUT THIS!
HEY, TARO, THERE'S ANOTHER NOTE.
"P S"

#2
Crossroad

...TOLD ME...
...TO WAIT HERE FOR HER.
RUMIKO-MAMA...

DAMN THAT WOMAN !!!
"SAY HELLO TO MOMMY'S NEWEST LITTLE GIRL ♡
TAKE GOOD CARE OF HER. ♡
RU-MIKO" ♡

RUMIKO, YOU SNEAK!
GET BACK HERE THIS INSTANT!
Zoom
P.S.
Say hello to mommy's newest little girl. ♡
Take good care of her! ♡
Rumiko ♡

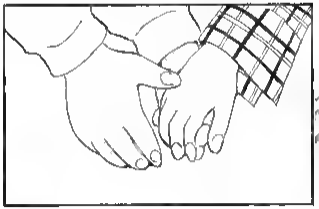
crossroad Chapter 2: Crossroad

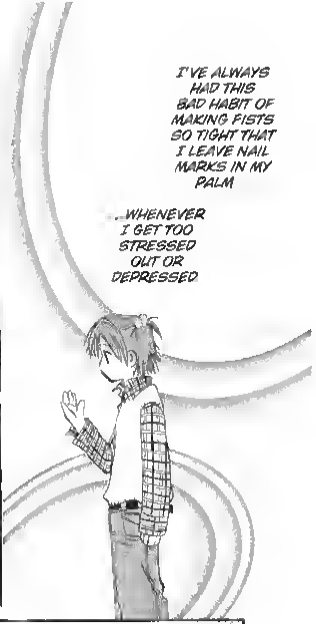
Part 2

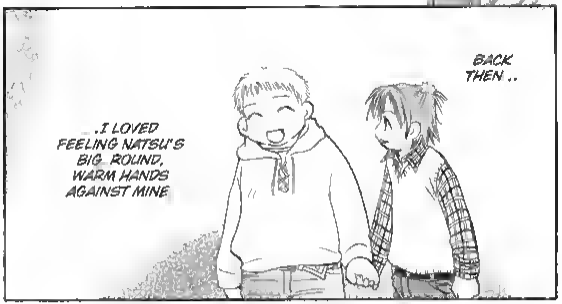
So far, we've only met the "family" members, but we don't yet know the origin of their names. Since I might not get a chance to explain it in volume 2, I'd better get my explanations out now! Is it too soon for details like this? Oh, whatever. Without further ado, here's the meaning behind the family members' names!

- Kajitsu — Basically means "fruit." I've always liked the sound of it, so I tend to use that name a lot.
- Natsu — Meaning "summer." I think summer always goes well with fruit.
- Satsuki — I wanted a name that captured the beauty of nature. It reminds me of snow, the moon and flowers.
- Taro — Sorry. That's just my dog's name.
- Rumiko — No particular meaning, really. It's from Rumiko Konagaji. It has that "Run-Run" kind of feel.

Did you just call me a dog?







THEN THERE'S MY BIG BRO, TARO I HAVEN'T SEEN HIM IN 7 YEARS, EITHER
ALTHOUGH HE HAS GROWN A BIT CRUDE SINCE THEN, INSIDE HE'S STILL THE SAME
HEY!
Older Brother Natsu Age 20
IS THAT ALL YOU HAVE TO SAY ABOUT ME!?
AT THE MOMENT, OUR BIGGEST PROBLEM IS ..
. THE FACT THAT OUR MOTHER HAS PULLED ANOTHER DISAPPEARING ACT ..
..AND LEFT WITH US..
A..
A NEW MEMBER OF THE FAMILY?!
...A LITTLE GIRL
AND SHE THINKS LEAVING BEHIND A LETTER MAKES IT ALL RIGHT!?
I'll eat the damn thing!
UH SO HOW OLD ARE YOU, LITTLE GIRL?
THIS MANY!
6
NOW, I HAVE TO ASK JUST IN CASE...
WHAT'S YOUR MOMMY'S NAME?
RUMIKO.
AND WHERE DID YOU COME FROM?
UM . UM ..
I... DON'T KNOW?
Where am I?
GREAT. WHAT DO WE DO NOW?
ISN'T THERE SOME-PLACE WE SHOULD TAKE HER?
First Family Meeting
I'M SO ANGRY, I CAN'T EVEN SEE STRAIGHT!
munch munch

UM...
EXCUSE ME..?
RUMIKO-MAMA'S GONNA COME HOME SOON, RIGHT?
'CUZ I DON'T HAVE A DADDY
SHE SAID SHE'D COME BACK TO GET ME AFTER SHE FOUND A BIG HOUSE FOR EVERYONE TO LIVE IN TOGETHER.

...
OH.
THAT OLD STORY.

SHE SAID THE SAME THING TO US

YOU SHOULDN'T BELIEVE EVERY-THING SHE SAYS
THAT WAS JUST A LIE
THAT WOMAN'S STILL SAYING THE SAME OLD CRAP?
?
SIGH

TWO YEARS AND THREE MONTHS
WAS IT REALLY TWO YEARS?
...AND THEN SHE RAN OFF AND LEFT US BEHIND
SHE KEPT TELLING US THAT SAME STORY FOR TWO WHOLE YEARS...

Nine Years Ago...
...YOU ALL BE GOOD AND LISTEN TO YOUR GRANNY.
OKAY THEN, TARO-CHAN, NA-CHAN, KAJITSU...
chirp
chirp

SO SOON IT'LL MAKE YOUR HEAD SPIN! ♡
Yeay!
NO, REALLY HOW SOON?
Ouch!

OH, VERY VERY SOON! ♡
HOW SOON IS SOON?
There's a good girl

AND AFTER WE FIND A BIG, BIG HOUSE FOR US ALL TO LIVE IN...
MOMMY AND DADDY HAVE A LOT OF WORK TO DO.
...I'LL COME BACK AND GET YOU SOON! ♡

He keeps stuffing his face, as messy, how old he gets.

I WONDER WHERE TO..?

MUH? WHERE'D THE LITTLE GIRL GO?

I THINK TARO TOOK HER OUT SOMEWHERE

I'M SURE IT WON'T BE LONG BEFORE SOME NICE LADY WILL TRY TALKING TO YOU

GO AHEAD AND LET HER TAKE YOU TO THE POLICE STATION

EVENTUALLY YOU'LL HIT A MAIN ROAD.

JUST FOLLOW THIS STREET STRAIGHT AHEAD

GOT IT?

THEN I WANT YOU TO SIT DOWN IN THE MOST CROWDED PLACE YOU CAN FIND AND START CRYING

clatta

clink

..TRYING TO DEFEND MOM..

I DON'T PLAN ON..

LENGTH

...AND SAY "I'M HOME!"

AND JUST WHERE ON EARTH IS VENEZUELA?

BUT SOMEHOW I DON'T FEEL LIKE I'VE BEEN THROWN AWAY.

I JUST DON'T KNOW WHEN SHE'LL COME BACK AGAIN..

WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN TO THAT LITTLE GIRL..?

Squeeze

I HAVE NO PLACE TO COME HOME TO.

AND NO MORE GRANNY TO WELCOME ME BACK

BUT ONE THING'S FOR CERTAIN-- I HAVE TO GET OUT OF THIS HOUSE.

GET IN THE HOUSE.

WAIT A MINUTE--!

JUST WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING WITH HER?

GRAB

TARO! YOU CAN'T JUST--!

WAIT!

TMP TMP TMP TMP

SCRAM, KID BEFORE IT STARTS RAINING AGAIN.

WELL, EVEN IF YOU COULD TRACK DOWN RUMIKO...

YOU COULD HAVE AT LEAST TAKEN HER TO THE AUTHORITIES YOURSELF! HOW CAN YOU BE SO CRUEL TO A LITTLE GIRL LIKE THAT?

BUT TARO--!

SLAM!

RATTLE

. WOULD YOU REALLY WANT THAT CHILD TO END UP IN THE HANDS OF THAT CRAZY WOMAN?

AND WHATEVER YOU DO, DON'T SAY A WORD ABOUT RUMIKO OR US TO THEM!

THEN YOU TELL THEM THAT YOU DON'T KNOW YOUR NAME, JUST LIKE I TAUGHT YOU.

WELL, CHIN UP, KID. DON'T GIVE UP HOPE.

RUB RUB

DON'T FEEL BAD. IT'S NOT LIKE ANY OF THIS WAS YOUR FAULT...

YOU JUST HAPPENED TO HAVE A LOT OF BAD LUCK EARLY IN LIFE.

IT JUST AIN'T FAIR, IS IT?

RATTLE

TARO!!

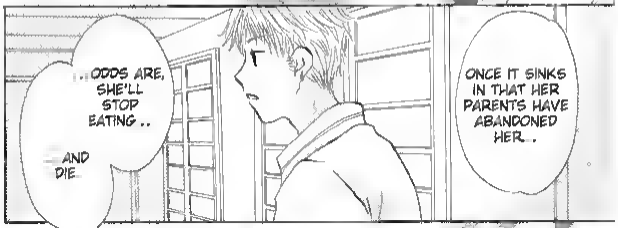
OFF YOU GO, NOW...

GOOD LUCK FINDING A REAL FAMILY...

AND IF THINGS HAD JUST BEEN A *LITTLE* DIFFERENT...
...YOU WOULD'VE WOUND UP WITH THE SAME FATE AS THAT GIRL.
SO DON'T START CRYING TO ME HOW SORRY YOU FEEL FOR HER
SHE'S BETTER OFF ON HER OWN
YOU OWE GRANNY YOUR LIFE!

KAJITSU!!

THE LITTLE BRAT'S GONNA DIE OF STARVATION


ONCE IT SINKS IN THAT HER PARENTS HAVE ABANDONED HER...
...ODDS ARE, SHE'LL STOP EATING...
...AND DIE

THE ONLY REASON YOU'VE GROWN UP SO HEALTHY...
...IS BECAUSE YOU HAD SOMEONE THERE TO FORCE YOU TO EAT.
FACE IT. YOU WERE LUCKY.

LEAVE HER AND GET INSIDE!
YOU JUST DON'T GET IT, DO YOU?
LOOM...

HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN WHO WILL BE PUTTING FOOD ON YOUR PLATE TOMORROW!?
DON'T TALK BACK TO ME!
NO!

SLAP
I DON'T RELY ON ANYONE.

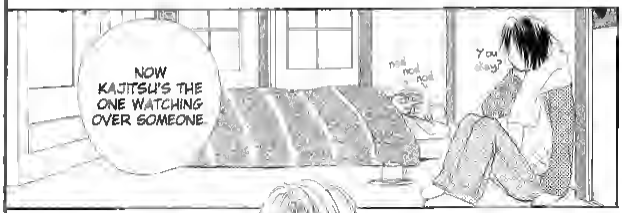
IF YOU'RE IN THE SAME SPOT AS ME, THEN THAT'S ALL THE MORE REASON I SHOULD HELP.

IF YOU'RE LIKE...
...HOW I WAS BACK THEN, IT'S NOT TOO LATE

THERE'S NO WAY I CAN JUST LEAVE YOU OUT HERE...
...Y'KNOW?

YOU THINK GOING OFF ON YOUR OWN MAKES YOU TOUGH OR SOMETHING?
BASH!
WE'RE ALL ALONE IN THIS WORLD, AND THE SOONER YOU LEARN THAT, THE BETTER!
SO DON'T GO AROUND TALKING ABOUT IT...
...AS IF IT MAKES YOU SOME KIND OF DAMN MARTYR!
YOU IDIOT!
...BUT IF YOU WEREN'T MY LITTLE SISTER, I WOULDN'T LISTEN TO YOUR BULLSHIT!
I DON'T KNOW HOW A KID LIKE YOU COULD GROW UP SO SPOILED...

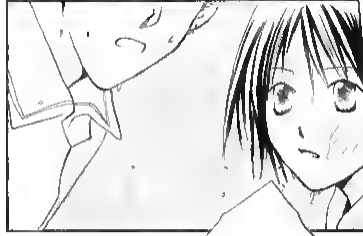
HEY!
YOU'RE TAKING THIS TOO FAR! THERE'S NO REASON TO HIT HER!
YOU SHUT UP.
I NEVER EXPECTED ANYONE TO TAKE CARE OF ME
...AND I NEVER ASKED YOU TO PUT ME UP, SO DON'T ACT SO PUT UPON! YOU CAN JUST WORRY ABOUT YOURSELF!
I. I DON'T CARE. I WAS PLANNING ON LIVING ON MY OWN, ANYWAY.
I CAN TAKE CARE OF MYSELF, SO WHAT'VE YOU GOT TO COMPLAIN ABOUT!?
I'LL BE FINE ON MY OWN! I'M A GIRL! THERE ARE PLENTY OF WAYS FOR ME TO FIND MONEY!!

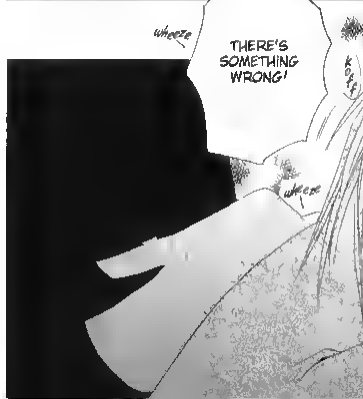

NOW KAJITSU'S THE ONE WATCHING OVER SOMEONE.
You okay?

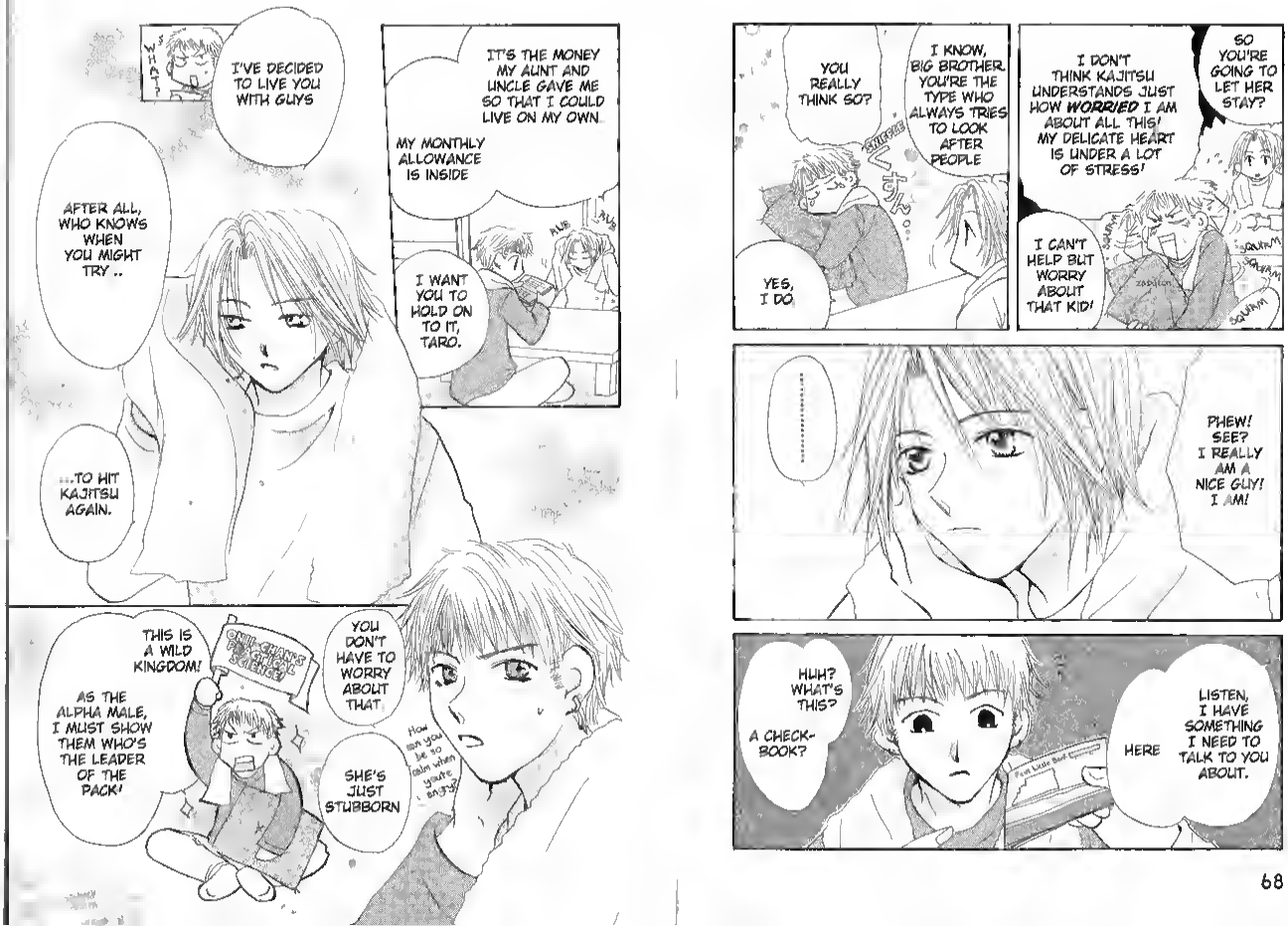
DO YOU PLAN ON THROWING HER BACK INTO THE RAIN AGAIN ONCE SHE GETS BETTER?
IT DOESN'T APPEAR TO BE TOO SERIOUS.
STOP TALKING LIKE YOU'RE COUNTING MY SINS!
...BUT WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO NEXT?

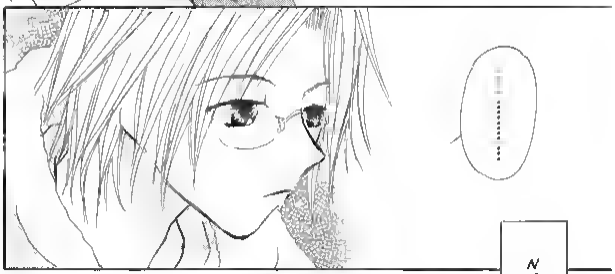
HOTTER
KAJITSU, YOU IDIOT!
I'M REALLY A KIND PERSON AT HEART.
AND IT'S NOT LIKE JAPAN'S THE SORT OF PLACE THAT'D LET A KID LIKE THAT DIE ON HER OWN
THAT'S WHY I HAD TO TRY AND GET RID OF HER BEFORE WE GOT ATTACHED.
OF COURSE I CAN'T DO THAT NOW!

HEY, GUYS!
HEY!
koff
koff


YOU MAKE ME WANNA PUKE!
EVER SINCE I GOT HERE, YOU'VE BEEN SO DAMN ARROGANT!
THUD...


wheeze
THERE'S SOMETHING WRONG!
koff
wheeze
koff
koff


SO YOU'RE GOING TO LET HER STAY?
I DON'T THINK KAJITSU UNDERSTANDS JUST HOW WORRIED I AM ABOUT ALL THIS! MY DELICATE HEART IS UNDER A LOT OF STRESS!
I CAN'T HELP BUT WORRY ABOUT THAT KID!
SQUIAM
I KNOW, BIG BROTHER. YOU'RE THE TYPE WHO ALWAYS TRIES TO LOOK AFTER PEOPLE
YOU REALLY THINK SO?
YES, I DO.
PHEW! SEE? I REALLY AM A NICE GUY! I AM!
.....
LISTEN, I HAVE SOMETHING I NEED TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT.
HERE
HUH? WHAT'S THIS?
A CHECK-BOOK?
IT'S THE MONEY MY AUNT AND UNCLE GAVE ME SO THAT I COULD LIVE ON MY OWN.
MY MONTHLY ALLOWANCE IS INSIDE
I WANT YOU TO HOLD ON TO IT, TARO.
I'VE DECIDED TO LIVE YOU WITH GUYS
WHAT?
AFTER ALL, WHO KNOWS WHEN YOU MIGHT TRY ..
...TO HIT KAJITSU AGAIN.
YOU DON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT THAT.
SHE'S JUST STUBBORN
How can you be so calm when you're angry?
THIS IS A WILD KINGDOM!
AS THE ALPHA MALE, I MUST SHOW THEM WHO'S THE LEADER OF THE PACK!



AW, SCREW IT YOU DON'T HAVE TO LISTEN TO ME BABBLE ON LIKE THIS

HEY, NATSU, YOU MIND RUNNING OUT AND BUYING SOMETHING SWEET?

SWEET? WHY DO YOU WANT THAT?

My eye itches...

I DUNNO

IT SEEMS LIKE SOMETHING GIRLS WOULD LIKE

Oni-chan is pooped out...

.....

NATSU...

NO, NO. NOT THAT ONE. I MEAN THE ONE FROM BEFORE!

SHOO! SHOO!

Its hard to keep the two straight...

NATSU...

IT HURTS SO MUCH

I FEEL LIKE I'M GOING TO DIE FROM THE PAIN

EVEN THOUGH THE RAIN-SOAKED GRAVEL WAS SO COLD...

EVEN THOUGH I'LL NEVER FORGIVE TARO'S HARSH WORDS AND VIOLENCE...

...I'M HELPLESS TO DO ANYTHING ABOUT IT

FIFTEEN YEARS ON THIS EARTH AND WHAT DO I HAVE TO SHOW FOR IT?

WAS I BORN...

...SO I COULD GROW UP TO BE SUCH A HELPLESS PERSON?

I'M SORRY FOR BEING SO HELPLESS

FOR NOT DOING ANYTHING BUT CRYING.

AND I KNOW JUST HOW TO DO IT!

IF I CRY...

...THEN I'LL EAT THOSE TEARS!

IT'S A FAILPROOF PLAN!

AND I'M GONNA DO WHATEVER IT TAKES TO SAVE YOU!

MY NAME IS KAJITSU

SA SATSUKI.

BY THE WAY, WHAT'S YOUR NAME?

HM?

YOU! HOLD IT RIGHT THERE!

...UNTIL HE CAN'T TAKE ANY MORE!

I'LL LAY IT INTO HIM...

THAT LITTLE GIRL REMINDS ME OF MYSELF WHEN I WAS HER AGE-- I HAVE TO HELP HER! BUT I DON'T KNOW HOW TO STAND UP TO TARO.

GRANNY WOULD KNOW WHAT TO DO. GRANNY COULD SAVE HER.

IF THIS LITTLE GIRL IS LIKE I WAS AT THAT AGE...

...I'LL HAVE TO BECOME STRONG LIKE GRANNY

BUT I'M...

NOT GRANNY

IT'S HUMILIATING, NATSU HUMILIATING!

GRANNY...

TELL ME HOW I'M SUPPOSED TO FIGHT, GRANNY.

HUFF
FUME
YOU AND I HAVE SOME UNFINISHED BUSINESS!
STOMP
STOMP
ズッカ
ズッカ
OKAY!
YOU WANT SOME MORE OF THIS!?
ズッカ
STOMP
I'LL MAKE YOUR MOLARS RATTLE!
I BEG YOU--!!
PLEASE SAVE THAT CHILD!
BOW!
WHAT...
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
I KNOW YOU TOLD MOM YOU'D TAKE ME IN, BUT DON'T WORRY ABOUT ME! PLEASE RAISE HER INSTEAD!
I KNOW YOU'LL BE ABLE TO FEED HER WELL, TARO!
THE GIRL'S DONE NOTHING WRONG! PLEASE SPARE HER!!
WHAT AM I, THE EVIL TYRANT?
What's come over you?
Let go of me!
GRAB
CUT IT OUT!
YOU'RE GIVING ME THE CREEPS!
HM?
RATTLE
EEEK!
Get away from me!
I didn't watch the tape, Sadako!
WHAT IS IT THIS TIME?
Sadako?
whap
whap
TAK

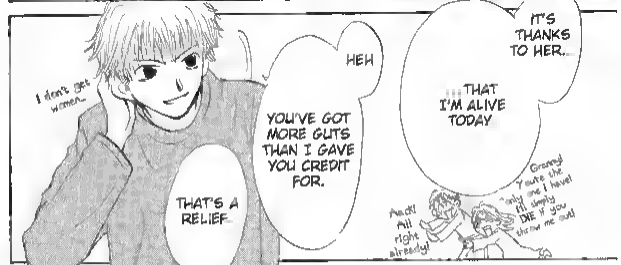
SO HE'S OKAY WITH IT?
BECAUSE IF THE GIRL'S STAYING WITH US...
...I'M COUNTING ON YOU TO TAKE CARE OF HER.
HMPHH
PHEW! I'M POOPED!
WHAT'S THIS?
BONK
Ouch!

I WASN'T SURE WHICH ONE YOU'D LIKE, THOUGH.
IT'S A CAKE.

HUFF
...CAME TO THIS HOUSE
WHEN I...

WH...
HUFF?
HUFF
HUFF
HUFF
WHERE DID YOU LEARN HOW TO ACT SO INDECENTLY!?

AND I'M NOT EVEN A BLOOD RELATIVE!
WHEN RUMIKO WAS JUST 18 YEARS OLD, SHE HAD TO BOW HER HEAD TO GRANNY SO MANY TIMES FOR MY SAKE


I don't get women...
THAT'S A RELIEF.
HEH
YOU'VE GOT MORE GUTS THAN I GAVE YOU CREDIT FOR.
IT'S THANKS TO HER...
...THAT I'M ALIVE TODAY
Ouch! All right already!
Granny! You're the only one I have! I'll surely DIE if you throw me out!

WHAT!? NOW YOU'RE ASKING FOR MONEY?
Talk about cheap!
I HOPE WE CAN GET ALONG FROM NOW ON

HE WANTED TO MAKE UP FOR THE WAY HE WAS BEHAVING
Hey! Don't put words in my mouth!
Peeping onii-chan
IT'S NOT FROM ME. IT'S FROM TARO
WH...WHY WOULD YOU DO THAT?
Something's fishy!
I WONDER IF IT'S TOO LATE TO THROW THAT UNGRATEFUL SNOT INTO THE RIVER?
IT'S A LITTLE TOO EARLY TO FORGIVE HIM
But I'll still take the cake.
I'LL BE LIVING WITH ALL OF YOU STARTING TODAY
AND...
...I THOUGHT YOU SHOULD KNOW.
SWOOP

HM?
WHAT'S THIS?
MAYBE HE DOESN'T LIKE ME TALKING ABOUT THE PAST
SO MUCH HAS CHANGED BETWEEN US OVER THE LAST SEVEN YEARS
.....

LOOK AT THAT
MY PALMS ARE...
..COVERED IN NAIL MARKS
HOW MANY TIMES...
...DID I HAVE TO CLENCH MY FISTS TODAY?

...YOU SAID YOU WEREN'T INTERESTED IN BEING MY FRIEND!
B-BUT YESTERDAY WHEN I SAID THE SAME THING...

...BUT I'D FEEL SORRY FOR TARO IF HE HAD TO DEAL WITH IT ALONE
I'VE CHANGED MY MIND
IT'S A DIFFICULT SITUATION

A COMPLETE 180.
YOU'RE THE ONE WHO'S CHANGED, NATSU.
...YOU USED TO BE...
BEFORE...

YOU REALLY HAVEN'T CHANGED AT ALL, HAVE YOU, KAJITSU?
WELL, EXCUSE ME FOR BEING A "DIFFICULT SITUATION"
AND, UH... HOW LONG ARE WE SUPPOSED TO HOLD HANDS?

HEY! KAJITSU!
WONDER IF KAJITSU'S FINISHED PACKING YET...
DO YOU HONESTLY EXPECT TO FIT ALL THIS CRAP INTO MY 4-TATAMI MAT* RUN-DOWN APARTMENT?
CHEAP-SKATE
* about 10 x 16
WELL, I TOLD YOU I'D BE MOVING IN...
...IS ALL YOUR FREAKIN' LUGGAGE!
It's in the way
THUMP
ONCE YOU'RE FINISHED ORGANIZING GRANNY'S THINGS, START PACKING YOUR OWN STUFF!
CUT IT BY 1/10TH!
Grab
TARO?
TARO!
WE'VE GOT THREE DAYS TO CLEAR OUT OF THIS PLACE!
HEY! YOU LISTENING TO ME!?
...DID YOU SAY JUST NOW?
WHAT...

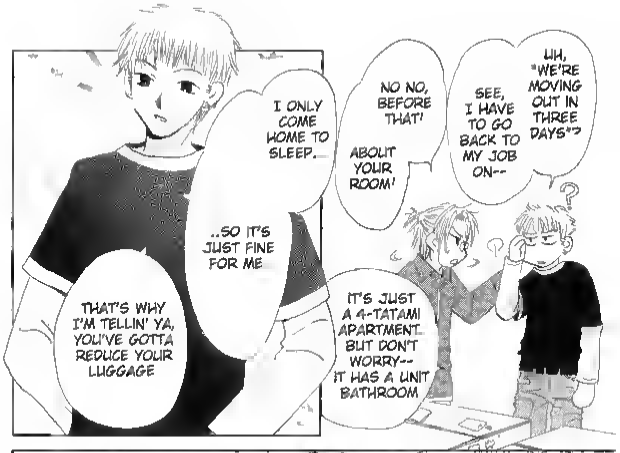
MAYBE HE FORGOT ALL ABOUT THE LETTERS
IS THE SWEET NATSU I USED TO LOVE STILL IN THERE?
I DON'T UNDERSTAND YOU, NATSU. ONE MINUTE YOU'RE NICE TO ME, THE NEXT YOU HATE ME.
Hey! That's mine!
I paid for it!

...HE'S JUST PRETENDING TO HAVE FORGOTTEN?
OR MAYBE...
No, no, no.
You can't eat the paper
munch munch

YOU CATCH A COLD?
WHAT I'M MORE WORRIED ABOUT NOW...
NAH, I DON'T THINK SO...
I've got a bad feeling...
ACHOO!
TAP TAP
TAP
Dear Natsu,
HM...
TAP
MAYBE I'LL JUST WRITE ABOUT HOW MUCH OF A JERK TARO WAS TODAY...
IT'S HARD TO WRITE IT NOW THAT THE REAL THING'S HERE

Zoop!
thumb
YOU SHOULD JUST BE THANKFUL YOU HAVE A ROOF OVER YOUR HEADS!
You'll freeze to death if you had to camp outside in the cold!
..LIVING IN A 4-TATAMI MAT ROOM?
ALL THIS STUFF AND FOUR PEOPLE ..

EVEN IF WE HAVE A ROOF
...THERE'S NO PLACE TO SLEEP!
WHAT DO I LOOK LIKE? A NINJA?
SATSUKI AND I WILL SLEEP STANDING UP
AND YOU AND NATSU WILL SLEEP ON THE CEILING


I ONLY COME HOME TO SLEEP..
..SO IT'S JUST FINE FOR ME
THAT'S WHY I'M TELLIN' YA, YOU'VE GOTTA REDUCE YOUR LUGGAGE
NO NO, BEFORE THAT! ABOUT YOUR ROOM!
SEE, I HAVE TO GO BACK TO MY JOB ON--
UH, "WE'RE MOVING OUT IN THREE DAYS"?
IT'S JUST A 4-TATAMI APARTMENT.. BUT DON'T WORRY-- IT HAS A UNIT BATHROOM

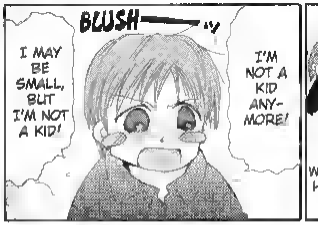
No way that's fit in my pic car!
ARE YOU DEAF? I TOLD YOU, YOU'RE ONLY ALLOWED ONE SHOPPING BAG WORTH OF THINGS!
HOW MUCH LUGGAGE CAN I BRING? SEE, THERE'S THIS NICE LITTLE CHEST I REALLY LIKE, SO.. IS IT OKAY?
UM.. TARO?

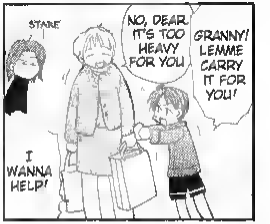
WHAT ARE YOU COMPLAINING ABOUT?
HAVE YOU EVEN THOUGHT ABOUT WHAT TAKING IN THE THREE OF US WOULD ENTAIL?
Were you just released from prison?
AND HERE I WAS THINKING YOU WOULD HANDLE THINGS
WH..
WHAT !?
THIS

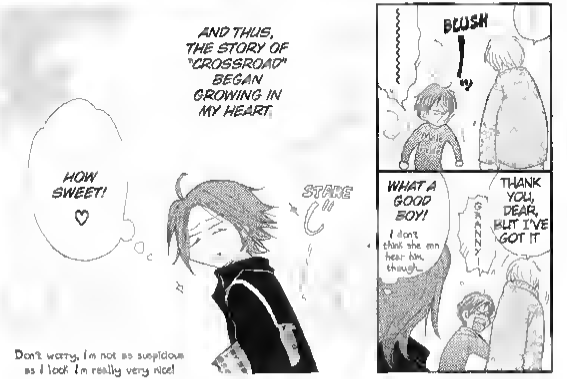
#3

Thank You

Bonus Comic I: Inspiration Strikes!

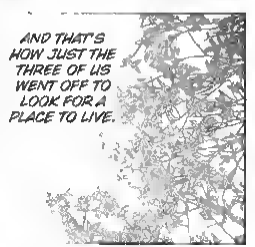






Don't worry, I'm not as suspicious as I look. I'm really very nice!

crossroad Chapter 3: Thank You



Part 3

Originally, I thought about including a haiku from Taneda Santoka in each book, but then it would end up looking like "Hanaoko Runrun." He made a lot of beautiful poems, so I suggest you read them all on your own! Chapters three and four were inspired by the poem that goes, "It's good after all, to be all by myself ~ Weeds It's sad after all, to be alone all by myself ~ Hay" As to WHY I chose Santoka, it came to me when I was vacationing in Africa. I was making notes for Crossroad as I ripped across the Sahara on a 4WD in my journal I wrote down, "What do I seek and where do I go? Inquiring and walking in the wind" That's when I realized "This is it!" Another favorite haiku of mine goes, "There is no other road than this, amidst the deep grass."

HA HA HA HA
YEAH, AND FIVE TIMES SATSUKI'S AGE.
15 YEARS
THAT'S TWICE AS OLD AS WE ARE

WOW!
QUIET TWO BEDROOM APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM, DINING ROOM AND KITCHEN.
HOW'S THIS ONE SOUND?
THAT SOUNDS GREAT!
BUILT THIRTY YEARS AGO...

JUST YOU WATCH, TARO! WE'LL BE JUST FINE ON OUR OWN!
TWO TIMES OR FIVE TIMES, IT'S TOTALLY FINE WITH ME! LET'S TALK TO A REAL ESTATE AGENT NOW!

HUH!?
WHAT DO YOU MEAN, "NO"?

I'LL FIND A HOUSE FOR ALL OF US TO LIVE IN!
Press button for service.
HEY! IT WON'T OPEN!

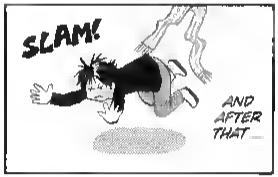
GOOD JOB!
Can't read the big words.
HAS A
AND
ALSO
TWO
NA NA NA

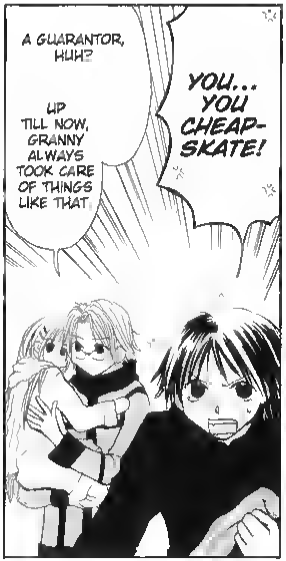
HOW ABOUT YOU, SATSUKI?
NOPE

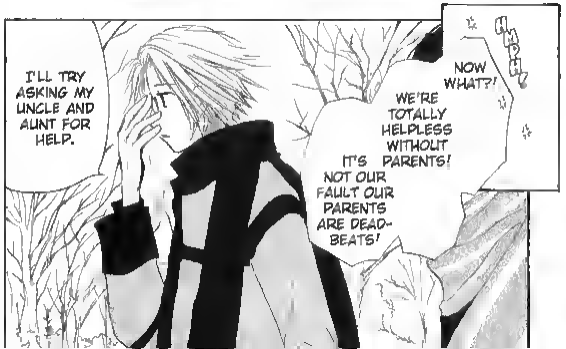
WE HAVEN'T EVEN MOVED IN AND ALREADY HE'S TRYING TO MANIPULATE US WITH FEAR TACTICS! DOES HE HAVE SOME SORT OF CHEMICAL IMBALANCE?
IT'S ALL TARO'S FAULT FOR GETTING ANGRY SO QUICKLY!
Hey! I'm not THAT bad!

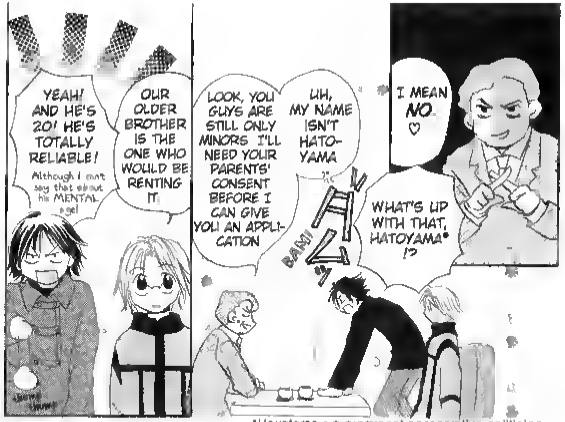
OH!
Hmph! Give me a break! Our brother & sister union is officially over!
mutter mutter mutter mutter mutter mutter mutter

JUST WHOSE SIDE ARE YOU ON, NATSU?!
YEAH, I KNOW THAT!
I'M NEUTRAL
FACE IT, WE DON'T HAVE PARENTS. WE NEED A LEADER

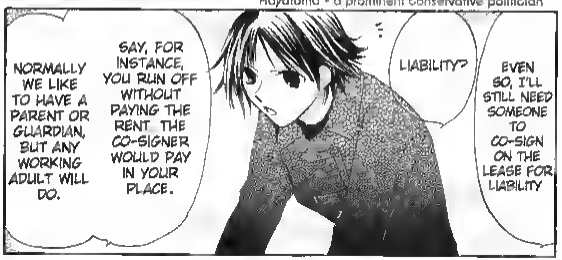


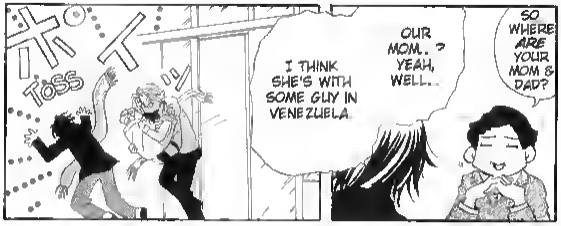




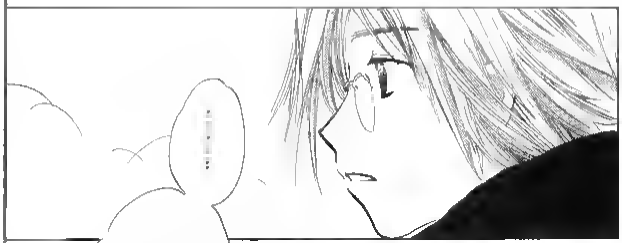


*Hoyatoma = a prominent conservative politician





Just who is this guy?



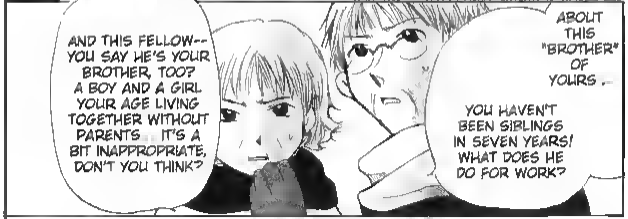
LET'S TALK IT OVER WITH TARO WHEN WE GET HOME

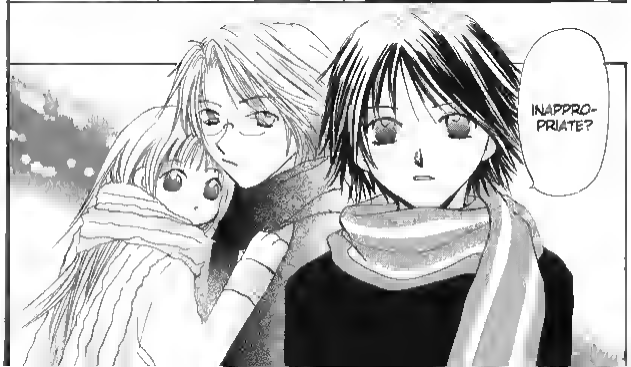
...AND DIDN'T SAY A WORD.
FOR A MOMENT, HE GOT A FAR-OFF LOOK ON HIS FACE...
SEVEN LOST YEARS THAT I KNOW NOTHING ABOUT

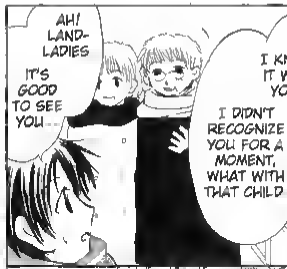
THEY'RE REALLY KIND FOLKS, AREN'T THEY?
NATSU USED TO WRITE TO ME ABOUT THEM...
...SO THEY'LL BE SURE TO LEND A HAND
MM-HM
THEY'RE STILL IN JAPAN...
THEY WERE THE ONES WHO TOOK YOU IN...
...AFTER YOUR DAD LEFT MOM, RIGHT?
...IN HIS LETTERS
YOU LOVED THEM A LOT. I MEAN, YOU STILL DO, RIGHT?

I WOULD DO ANYTHING FOR THEM
AND IF IT WAS...
...FOR THEIR SAKE...
...I WOULDN'T MIND DYING.

WE'RE GOING TO BE LIVING WITH MY OLDER BROTHER NOW.
SORRY ABOUT THAT
IT'S TAKING A BIT LONGER TO MOVE OUT THAN I THOUGHT.
AND SHE LEFT THAT POOR CHILD BEHIND?
YOU SAY RUMIKO-SAN'S RUN OFF AGAIN?
EH?
WELL, I SUPPOSE THAT'S HOW SHE'S ALWAYS BEEN
BUT STILL...


AND THIS FELLOW--YOU SAY HE'S YOUR BROTHER, TOO? A BOY AND A GIRL YOUR AGE LIVING TOGETHER WITHOUT PARENTS... IT'S A BIT INAPPROPRIATE, DON'T YOU THINK?
ABOUT THIS "BROTHER" OF YOURS...
YOU HAVEN'T BEEN SIBLINGS IN SEVEN YEARS! WHAT DOES HE DO FOR WORK?

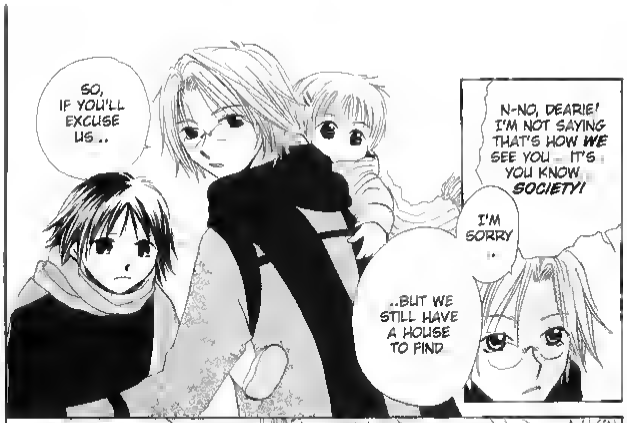

INAPPRO-PRIATE?


AH! LAND-LADIES
IT'S GOOD TO SEE YOU...
I KNEW IT WAS YOU!
I DIDN'T RECOGNIZE YOU FOR A MOMENT, WHAT WITH THAT CHILD

Hold me!
SO...
WHO WOULD THAT BE WITH YOU, DEARIE?
HUH?

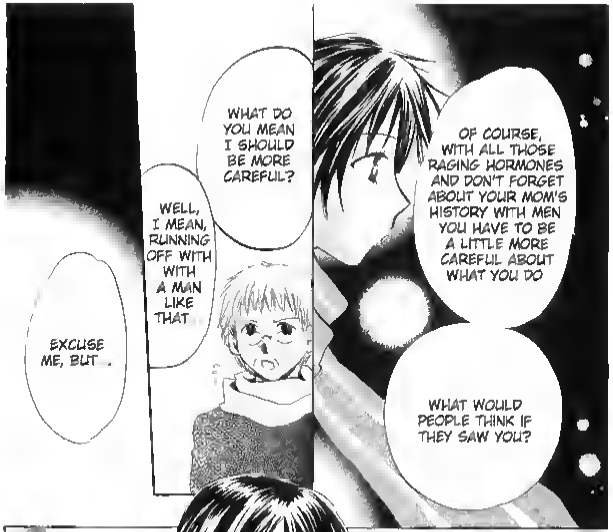
KAJITSU-CHAN?
IF NATSU LOVES THEM SO MUCH HE'D DIE FOR THEM, WHY DOESN'T HE LIVE WITH THEM NOW?

WHO ARE THEY?
OH, FRIENDS OF GRANNY.
Oh...
OH! NO, NO! IT'S NOT WHAT YOU THINK!
THEY'RE JUST MY LITTLE BROTHER AND SISTER!
Totally look like a couple with their kid!


SO, IF YOU'LL EXCUSE US..
N-NO, DEARIE! I'M NOT SAYING THAT'S HOW WE SEE YOU... IT'S YOU KNOW... SOCIETY!
I'M SORRY...
...BUT WE STILL HAVE A HOUSE TO FIND

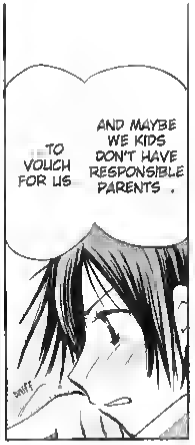
DON'T MIND THEM...
COME ON, KAJITSU
LET'S GO.

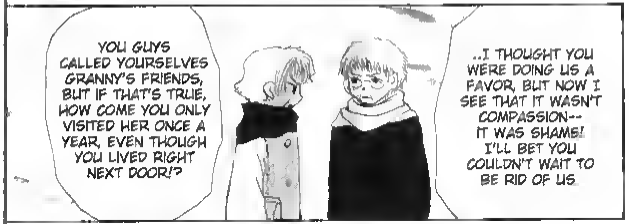
Y-YES... WE SHOULD BE GOING TOO...
BAM!


OF COURSE, WITH ALL THOSE RAGING HORMONES AND DON'T FORGET ABOUT YOUR MOM'S HISTORY WITH MEN YOU HAVE TO BE A LITTLE MORE CAREFUL ABOUT WHAT YOU DO
WHAT WOULD PEOPLE THINK IF THEY SAW YOU?
WHAT DO YOU MEAN I SHOULD BE MORE CAREFUL?
WELL, I MEAN, RUNNING OFF WITH WITH A MAN LIKE THAT...
EXCUSE ME, BUT...

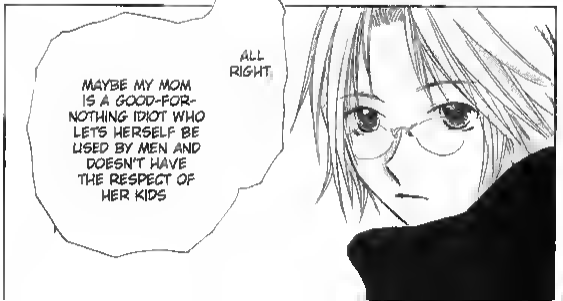
...JUST WHAT KIND OF PERSON...
...DO YOU TWO THINK I AM?

I DON'T UNDERSTAND YOU ADULTS!
BUT IT'S NOT LIKE WE HAVE ANY CHOICE!
ALL THAT TIME YOU LET GRANNY AND ME STAY IN THAT HOUSE

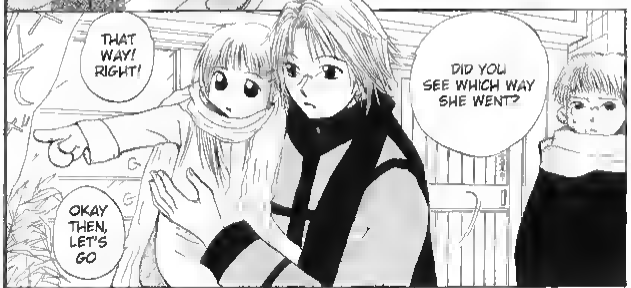

...TO VOUCH FOR US
AND MAYBE WE KIDS DON'T HAVE RESPONSIBLE PARENTS .
SNIFF


YOU GUYS CALLED YOURSELVES GRANNY'S FRIENDS, BUT IF THAT'S TRUE, HOW COME YOU ONLY VISITED HER ONCE A YEAR, EVEN THOUGH YOU LIVED RIGHT NEXT DOOR!?
..I THOUGHT YOU WERE DOING US A FAVOR, BUT NOW I SEE THAT IT WASN'T COMPASSION-- IT WAS SHAME! I'LL BET YOU COULDN'T WAIT TO BE RID OF US

IF I'M A KID...
NOT THAT I WOULD EXPECT YOU TO UNDERSTAND-- YOU'RE JUST KIDS!
YOUNG LADY, WE ADULTS HAVE OUR OWN PROBLEMS TO WORRY ABOUT!


ALL RIGHT
MAYBE MY MOM IS A GOOD-FOR-NOTHING IDIOT WHO LETS HERSELF BE USED BY MEN AND DOESN'T HAVE THE RESPECT OF HER KIDS

NOW, THEN...
...IF YOU'LL EXCUSE US...
WE'VE BEEN HAVING SOME TROUBLE WITH THE REAL ESTATE AGENTS
ER... SHE'S HAD A ROUGH DAY...
DASH!
OH?


THAT WAY! RIGHT!
DID YOU SEE WHICH WAY SHE WENT?
OKAY THEN, LET'S GO

"I'M SO HAPPY."

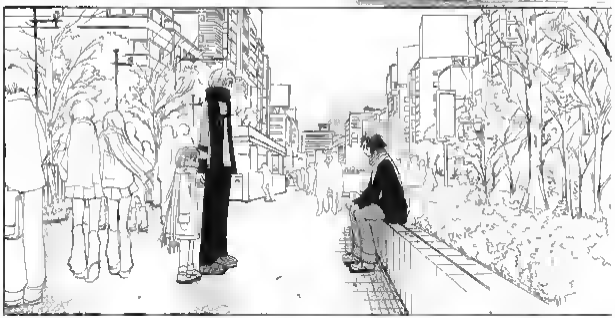
A SOCIETY THAT'S TOTALLY SCREWED UP, THANKS TO THE STUPID DECISIONS THAT ADULTS MAKE...
...AND YET YOU ADULTS ALWAYS ACT AS IF IT'S THE KIDS THAT ARE THE PROBLEM!
EVERY DAY IS A BATTLE
AND DON'T YOU DARE THINK...
THAT I ENJOY THE FIGHT!
THEN I'LL FIGHT...
...LIKE ONLY A KID CAN!
EVERY DAY, WE "KIDS" HAVE TO STRUGGLE TO MAKE OUR WAY IN A WORLD WE DON'T UNDERSTAND

HA HA HA HA...
LIFE'S GOTTEN SO TIRESOME
I DUNNO...

I KNOW HOW YOU FEEL

Squeeze

"I'M SO HAPPY YOU'RE HERE WITH ME, KAJITSU."
BUT NOW I HAVE KAJITSU, TARO, AND NATSU TO KEEP ME COMPANY. I COULDN'T BE HAPPIER."
"YOUR POOR GRANNY'S BEEN ALL ALONE FOR SO LONG...



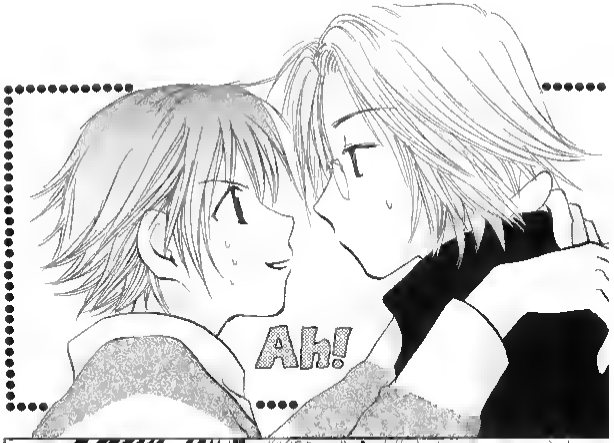
GUESS I HAD A LOT OF PENT- UP EMOTIONS SINCE GRANNY PASSED AWAY.
I... I'M SORRY I KINDA LOST IT BACK THERE

NOTHING COULD HAVE PREPARED ME FOR THE NEWS LATER THAT NIGHT...
WHAT? YOU FOUND A HOUSE?
SO, WHERE IS IT?
RIGHT HERE.
THIS HOUSE WAS GOING UP FOR RENT...
...SO WE'RE GOING TO RENT IT.
YOU MEAN...
...WE DON'T HAVE TO MOVE ANYWHERE!?
NATSU, THAT'S GREAT!!

AMIDST THIS CROWD OF STRANGERS...
...RIGHT NOW, I HAVE SOMEONE...
ALL THOSE PEOPLE OUT THERE.. I DON'T NEED THEM.
I DON'T NEED ANYONE WHO DOESN'T OFFER A HAND TO HOLD WHEN I NEED IT.
...WHO'S THERE TO HOLD MY HAND WITHOUT ME HAVING TO SAY A WORD.
AND THE HAND HOLDING MINE RIGHT NOW IS SO WARM AND COMFORTING...
THAT'S ALL I NEED TO KNOW. THAT'S ALL I NEED TO BELIEVE IN.

LET ME TELL YOU, BRO, I'M GONNA BE SLEEPING SOUNDLY TONIGHT!
For the first time in ages!
DREAMS DON'T COME TRUE EVERY DAY, YOU KNOW
YOU TWO MAKE SURE YOU SAY THANKS AS WELL
THANK YOU VERY MUCH!
Rattle...

UM...
EXCUSE ME...?
CLOMP CLOMP CLOMP


Ah!

STARE

"THOSE OLD WOMEN FROM BEFORE WENT TO VISIT TARO."

"THEY TALKED IT OVER WITH HIM, AND..."

YOU PERV!
HEY! WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING? IN FRONT OF A KID, NO LESS!
NOW IS THIS MY FAULT?
throb throb

THANK YOU FOR STAYING WITH YOUR GRANNY...

...UNTIL THE VERY END...

YOUR GRANNY...

.. REALLY LOVED YOU, KAJITSU-CHAN

I'M SURE SHE WAS NEVER LONELY..

...AND STAYING BY HER SIDE

...WITH YOU THERE WATCHING OVER HER...

UM...

ABOUT EARLIER..

I'M SORRY.

AND UM...

THANK YOU

SWIPE

IF YOU EVER HAVE ANY PROBLEMS.

AS LONG AS THE REAL ESTATE AGENT GETS THE MONTHLY RENT, THEN I SEE NO PROBLEM WITH YOU ALL STAYING ON BOARD.

WE'D BEEN MEANING TO PUT THAT HOUSE UP ON THE MARKET FROM THE START.

AND ONE LAST THING...

Y-YES, MA'AM!

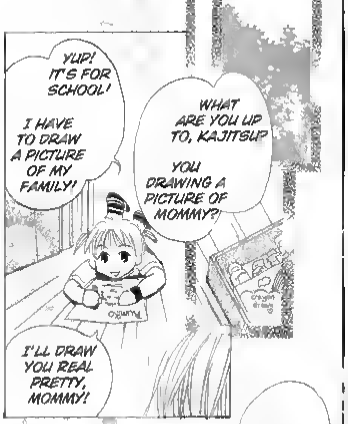
I'M SURE IT WON'T BE EASY FOR YOU KIDS, LIVING ALONE.

...DON'T HESITATE TO TELL US.

YOU'RE SUCH A GOOD GIRL.
YUP!
I'M SO HAPPY!
LET ME SEE, DEAR OH! YOU DREW A PICTURE OF ME?
I GOT A FLOWER MARK!
GRANNY, LOOK!

THANK YOU!
THANK YOU, KAJITSU.

SO I SWEAR I'LL NEVER CRY AGAIN.
GRANNY WOULD WORRY IF SHE SAW ME CRYING.
THANK YOU.

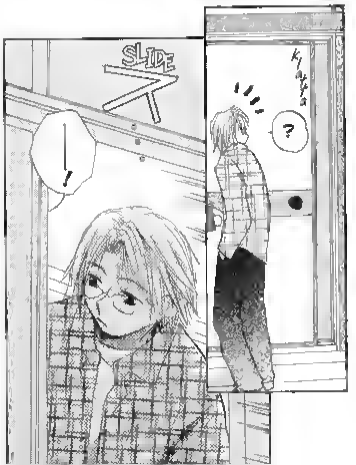

YUP! IT'S FOR SCHOOL!
I HAVE TO DRAW A PICTURE OF MY FAMILY!
WHAT ARE YOU UP TO, KAJITSU?
YOU DRAWING A PICTURE OF MOMMY?!
I'LL DRAW YOU REAL PRETTY, MOMMY!

WHY DON'T YOU DRAW A PICTURE OF GRANNY, INSTEAD?
DON'T WORRY ABOUT ME, KAJITSU

THANK YOU.

A WINTER THAT I'D NEVER FORGET...

THE WINTER OF MY FIFTEENTH YEAR...

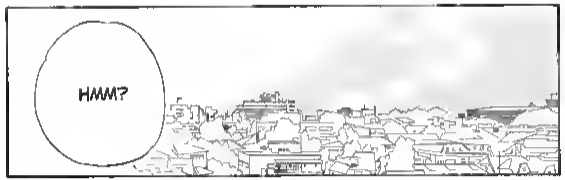


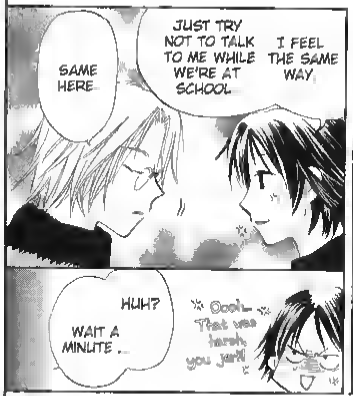
EVEN IF I CRY...

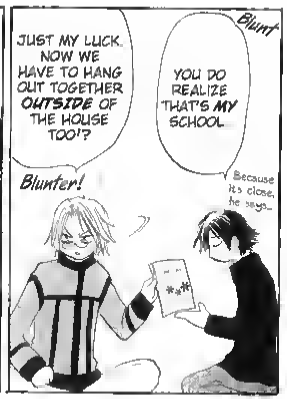
...YOU CAN REST IN PEACE, KNOWING THAT I'LL BE OKAY.

...DEPARTED...

...SILENTLY.




SAME HERE.
JUST TRY NOT TO TALK TO ME WHILE WE'RE AT SCHOOL.
I FEEL THE SAME WAY.
HUH?
WAIT A MINUTE...
Ooo!... That was harsh, you jerk!


Blunt
JUST MY LUCK. NOW WE HAVE TO HANG OUT TOGETHER OUTSIDE OF THE HOUSE TOO!?
YOU DO REALIZE THAT'S MY SCHOOL.
Blunter!
Because it's close, he says...

Fed Up.
HM?
WHAT IS IT THIS TIME?
DAMN IT!
DID ANYONE THINK TO REGISTER SATSUKI FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL?
Yet another problem!
OH NO!

ARE YOU SURE IT'S OKAY THAT YOU'RE MISSING SCHOOL?
KAJITSU.

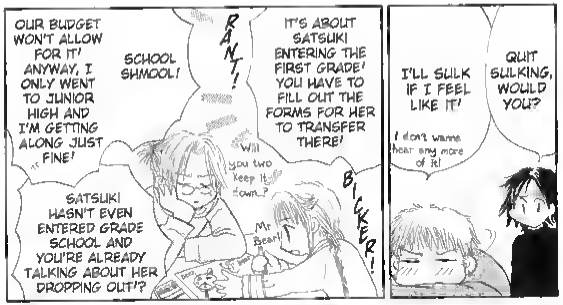
NO NO! I SHOULD HAVE GONE TODAY!
UH.

IT WAS THE CLOSEST ONE.
YOU'RE GOING TO THIS SCHOOL?
WAIT A SECOND
Transfer Application

Just how long have I been mourning? This is bad...
IT'S JUST, WITH ALL THAT'S BEEN GOING ON, I COMPLETELY FORGOT ABOUT SCHOOL!

#4

The Letter


OUR BUDGET WON'T ALLOW FOR IT! ANYWAY, I ONLY WENT TO JUNIOR HIGH AND I'M GETTING ALONG JUST FINE!
SCHOOL SHMOOL!
RANT!
IT'S ABOUT SATSUKI ENTERING THE FIRST GRADE! YOU HAVE TO FILL OUT THE FORMS FOR HER TO TRANSFER THERE!
Will you two keep it down...?
Mr. Bear!
BICKER!
SATSUKI HASN'T EVEN ENTERED GRADE SCHOOL AND YOU'RE ALREADY TALKING ABOUT HER DROPPING OUT!?
I'LL SULK IF I FEEL LIKE IT!
I don't wanna hear any more of it!
QUIT SULKING, WOULD YOU?

BUT LITTLE DID WE KNOW...
WAIT! TARO, YOU CAN'T JUST LEAVE NOW!
I'VE GOT A LONG DRIVE TOMORROW I'LL BE GONE FOR A FEW DAYS
SHUT UP ALREADY! I'M TIRED!
HMPH!
Sulking Oni-chan
Important
...THAT OUR LUCK WAS ABOUT TO CHANGE.
Taro, wait!

crossroad Chapter 4: The Letter

Part 4

Crossroad of course takes place in Japan, but along the way, I kept all Asian children in mind. I was also inspired by a story about Guatemalan children I saw on TV. I think the problem of orphans having to take care of themselves is a truly global story. Even now, I can remember the children I met during my trip to Thailand. I'll never forget the way their older brother looked after them, and how even though their faces were dirty and they were tricksters, they were still so pure of heart. According to the children in the orphanage, they were always hungry, and starving. But they owned a dog, and after three days of no food, they split a piece of bread they'd found with it, because it was their friend. Even though I know that the world is made up of many things that are far from beautiful, there are still beautiful people within it. Knowing that those people are out there keeps me going.

YES, MA'AM.
A FRIEND..
...SO I'LL GIVE YOU THE HANDOUTS WE'VE BEEN USING IN CLASS. YOU CAN COPY DOWN THE NOTES FROM A FRIEND
I'M SURE YOU'VE FALLEN BEHIND ON YOUR STUDIES DURING YOUR TIME OFF...

TODA-SAN?
HUH?
I DON'T HAVE ANY FRIENDS
THANK YOU VERY MUCH. EXCUSE ME
FRIENDS?
CAN WE TALK TO YOU FOR A SEC?
UM...

YEAH--DON'T REMIND ME
IT'S LIKE WE'RE ALL DANCING IN THE PALM OF RUMIKO-SAN'S HAND
BUT STILL, WITH ONE LESS PROBLEM TO DEAL WITH, THE TODA HOUSEHOLD WAS FINALLY MOVING TOWARDS A NORMAL LIFE

...RUMIKO HAD THE FORESIGHT TO COMPLETE THE PAPERWORK FOR SATSUKI BEFORE SHE RAN OFF.
DAMN THAT WOMAN!!
She planned this out all along, didn't she?!
CRASH!
ARGH!!
Onii-chan freaks out

I CAN'T BELIEVE I FORGOT TO GO..
THANKS FOR SENDING MY GRANNY FLOWERS ON BEHALF OF THE CLASS
IT MUST HAVE BEEN HARD ON YOU TODA-SAN
AND I PICKED UP MY HIGH SCHOOL LIFE FROM WHERE I'D LEFT OFF...

Tee hee!
WOW, TODA-SAN! THIS IS THE FIRST TIME YOU'VE EVER SPOKEN SO MUCH!
YOU ALWAYS SEEMED HARD TO APPROACH BUT WE'RE SO HAPPY NOW!
YOU NEVER EVEN RESPONDED WHEN WE TALKED TO YOU BEFORE
Blush
...

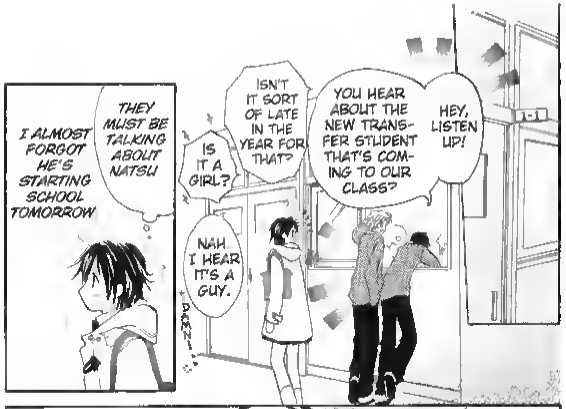
YOU'VE CHANGED SOMEHOW, TODA-SAN! IT'S LIKE YOU'RE MUCH NICER!
HUH?
HEY! HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO START EATING LUNCH WITH US FROM NOW ON?
WE'VE WANTED TO TALK WITH YOU FOR SO LONG!

I'VE NEVER BEEN GOOD AT THIS
I...
I... HAVEN'T CHANGED AT ALL
I'M JUST... ME...
UH...
I'M NOT GOOD AT...
...THIS SORT OF THING

YUP!
WE JUST WANTED TO LET YOU KNOW WE'RE HERE TO HELP IF YOU NEED IT.
OH...
WE HOPE YOU'LL FEEL BETTER SOON!
WE HEARD WHAT HAPPENED TO YOUR GRANDMA
WHO ARE THEY?
SURE. WHAT IS IT?

I'VE JUST HAD A LOT GOING ON LATELY
THAT'S OKAY I'M FINE
THEY MUST BE FROM MY CLASS.

BUT IT'S NICE TO KNOW YOU WERE WORRIED ABOUT ME.
THANK YOU...


I ALMOST FORGOT HE'S STARTING SCHOOL TOMORROW
THEY MUST BE TALKING ABOUT NATSU
IS IT A GIRL?
ISN'T IT SORT OF LATE IN THE YEAR FOR THAT?
NAH I HEAR IT'S A GUY.
YOU HEAR ABOUT THE NEW TRANSFER STUDENT THAT'S COMING TO OUR CLASS?
HEY, LISTEN UP!
DRRN!

I STILL WANT HIM TO HAVE THE BEST HIGH SCHOOL EXPERIENCE HE CAN!
HE CAN BE PRETTY COLD, THOUGH
Yup
I'LL HAVE TO GIVE HIM PLENTY OF SUPPORT AS HIS BIG SISTER
ALTHOUGH TECHNICALLY, WE'RE THE SAME AGE
Ugly
hmph!

I'M HOME!

OH, MY NOW I'M GETTING ALL NERVOUS FOR SOME REASON...
Wonder if things'll be okay...?

..I'D RATHER JUST BE ALONE
Yeah
That's too bad.
IF I'M GOING TO KEEP DOUBTING PEOPLE...
Oh...
I JUST DON'T KNOW HOW MUCH..
SORRY.
I LIKE BEING ALONE.
.. I CAN TRUST OTHER PEOPLE

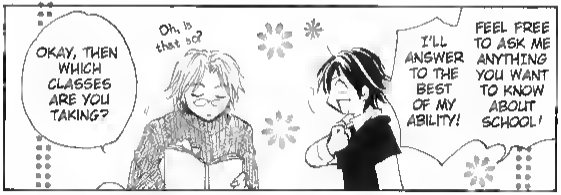
I'M SUCH A BAD PERSON.

WHOA! YOU ALREADY GOT ALL OF YOUR TEXT-BOOKS READY?
HE'S REALLY SOMETHING.
GULP
AH, I SEE.
THERE MAY ONLY BE ONE TERM LEFT THIS YEAR...
...BUT I DON'T WANT TO WASTE IT.
YOUR SCHOOL DOESN'T USE THE SAME ONES AS MY LAST SCHOOL SO I THOUGHT IT'D BE A GOOD IDEA TO GO THROUGH THEM.
TALK ABOUT SERIOUS!
I guess I should have expected that.
OH! THAT REMINDS ME!
Kajitsu found that you can actually spread out getting your books over the course of a week
WH-WHY DOESN'T HE JUST BUY THEM IN THE MORNING?
REALLY?
NA-CHAN'S MAKING US CREAM STEW!
HM?
WELCOME BACK!
tup
tup
tup
HEY.
WHAT'S THAT GOOD SMELL?
IT'S PRETTY MUCH JUST LIKE MAKING CURRY
IT'S REALLY NOT THAT AMAZING.
We also have instant curry for next time.
Let's eat!
WOW
I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU MADE ALL THIS!
YUP! It's good!
You want me to eat the kiddie crap? Over my dead body!
Away on a 3-day Trip
I CAN'T DO IT WHEN TARO'S AROUND.
Carrot
VEGGIE STARS? For Satsuki?
A Man's home-made cooking

YOU HAVE TO TAKE CHARGE YOURSELF.
I DON'T REALLY CARE
I NEVER EXPECTED MUCH FROM PUBLIC SCHOOL FROM THE START

I SHOULDN'T WORRY ABOUT HIM. I'M SURE HE'LL MAKE IT JUST FINE.
AND I THOUGHT I WAS CYNICAL ABOUT EDUCATION...
HE'S SO STRONG...

...SO I'LL SEE YOU LA--
I'M GOING TO DROP OFF SATSUKI AT SCHOOL...
NATSU?
TMP
TMP
TMP
RATTLE


OKAY, THEN WHICH CLASSES ARE YOU TAKING?
Oh, is that so?
I'LL ANSWER TO THE BEST OF MY ABILITY!
FEEL FREE TO ASK ME ANYTHING YOU WANT TO KNOW ABOUT SCHOOL!

...
NO IDEA!
ANYTHING ELSE?

YOU'D BETTER PREPARE FOR THE WORST!
HMPH.
I USED TO TRY HARD, BUT THIS SCHOOL IS SO BORING!
BULL'S EYE.
WH-WHAT WAS THAT!?
I GUESS YOU'RE THE "GOOD AT SPORTS AND ART CLASS" TYPE OF PERSON

IT WASN'T JUST MY IMAGI-NATION.

OKAY, THEN. I GUESS IT WAS JUST MY IMAGI-NATION

THAT'S A "K HIGH SCHOOL" UNIFORM!

THEY'VE GOT THE HIGHEST ACCEPTANCE RATE INTO TOKYO UNIVERSITY OF ANY SCHOOL IN THE NATION!

HE SURE STICKS OUT LIKE A SORE THUMB

THEY MUST MEAN NATSU

HEY! DID YOU SEE THE NEW GUY IN CLASS 1!?

YEAH! THE GUY WITH THE WEIRD SCHOOL UNIFORM, RIGHT?

TODA-SAN?

TOKYO UNIVER-SITY!?

TO

WHAT'S AN ELITE LIKE HIM DOING IN *OUR* SCHOOL?

THIS PLACE IS A DUMP!

YUP

No way!

I'VE NEVER SEEN ONE IN REAL LIFE!

Only on TV!

WHOA! YOUR SCHOOL UNIFORM!

IS IT FROM YOUR OLD SCHOOL?

JUST UNTIL I CAN BUY MYSELF A NEW ONE

YOU LOOK LIKE A HIGH SCHOOLER!

BUT ABOUT YOUR UNIFORM...

Uh... I AM in high school

WELL, THEY SELL THEM EVERY-WHERE

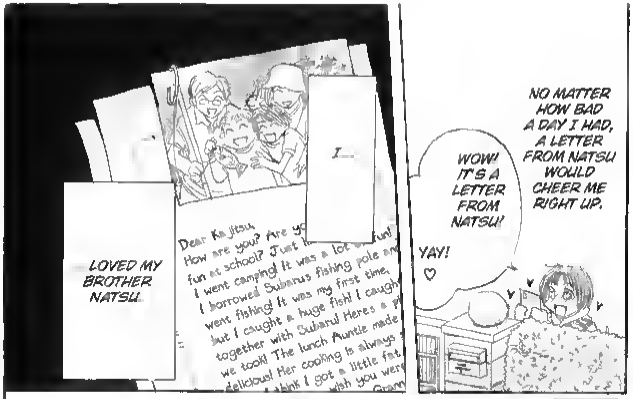
I FEEL LIKE I'VE SEEN IT SOMEWHERE BEFORE

HM...

YOU DON'T HAVE TO YELL. I CAN HEAR YOU JUST FINE.

SOME-ONE IN CLASS 1 WANTS TO TALK WITH YOU
ARE YOU KAJITSU TODA!?
Is Wow! that really her?
I can't see!
No way!
Whoa!
YOU'RE THE SISTER OF THAT TRANSFER STUDENT, NATSU TODA!?
EH?
IS IT TRUE THAT YOU'RE LIVING TOGETHER EVEN THOUGH YOU'RE NOT TIED BY BLOOD?!
W-WELL, THAT'S--
DID NATSU TELL YOU THAT?
No way!
CHATTER
What could it mean?
CHATTER
CHATTER
That's crazy!
You're kidding!
The older sister of the new transfer student in class 1?
OUR HOMEROOM TEACHER TOLD US THE WHOLE THING!
Like this
BLAH
BLAH
BLAH
BLAH
BLAH
AND JUST SO YOU ALL KNOW, TODA-KUN HERE IS THE STEP-BROTHER OF TODA KAJITSU IN CLASS 3.
THEY'RE NOT TIED BY BLOOD, BUT THEY'RE LIVING TOGETHER WITHOUT PARENTS! ISN'T THAT JUST THE FUNNIEST? HA HA HA HA!
SQUEAL KYAA!
A HOUSE WITH NO PARENTS!? I'M SO JEALOUS!
IS THIS REALLY ANY OF THEIR BUSINESS?
AND NATSU'S NOT EVEN RELATED BY BLOOD? SOUNDS JUICY!
WHERE ARE HER MORALS!?
TALK ABOUT TABOO!
LOOK, WE'RE PRACTICALLY STRANGERS WE HAVEN'T SEEN EACH OTHER IN SEVEN YEARS
THERE'S REALLY NOTHING TO GET WORKED UP ABOUT
IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR GOSSIP, GO SOMEWHERE ELSE. LIVING WITH NATSU IS ABOUT AS EXCITING AS WATCHING PAINT DRY
SILENCE...
NOD NOD NOD NOD
IS SHE ALWAYS LIKE THIS?
Scary!
GREAT LOOKS LIKE I OVERDID IT AGAIN
HMPH
WHY'S IT ALWAYS GOTTA TURN OUT LIKE THIS?
WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH ME?
MUST BE HOW I WAS BROUGHT UP
I WONDER WHAT NATSU'S UP TO NOW
TOK TOK

I HOPE HE'S NOT HAVING IT AS ROUGH AS ME
AH HA HA HA HA
HA HA HA
MAN, ARE YOU SERIOUS !?
HA HA HA HA HA
HELL, YEAH! WE'LL BRING YOU ALONG NEXT TIME!
SO, WHAT'RE DOING FOR LUNCH?
I DUNNO... THEY GOT A CAFETERIA HERE?
hyuck hyuck hyuck
DON'T EVEN THINK ABOUT THAT PLACE! IT'LL MAKE YOU SICK!
SICK, HUH? WHAT KIND OF SICK?
LIKE S.T.D.'S AND STUFF!
WHO KNOWS WHAT THOSE OLD HAGS DO TO THE FOOD!?
HA! HA! Evil I can imagine!
WOW... HE'S ALREADY MAKING FRIENDS
HE'S NEVER SMILED ONCE AT HOME.
I GUESS THERE'S NO NEED TO WORRY.
"I DON'T REALLY CARE."
AND HE'S SO GOOD AT EVERY-THING!
"I KNOW HOW YOU FEEL"


NO MATTER HOW BAD A DAY I HAD, A LETTER FROM NATSU WOULD CHEER ME RIGHT UP.
WOW! IT'S A LETTER FROM NATSU!
YAY! ♡
I...
LOVED MY BROTHER NATSU.

BEING AWAY FROM HIM...
...TORE MY HEART APART.

I MISSED HIM.
I MISSED HIM.
I MISSED HIM SO MUCH.
WHAT GIVES?
YOU'RE STILL SO HAPPY, NATSU...
...EVEN IF I'M NOT THERE.

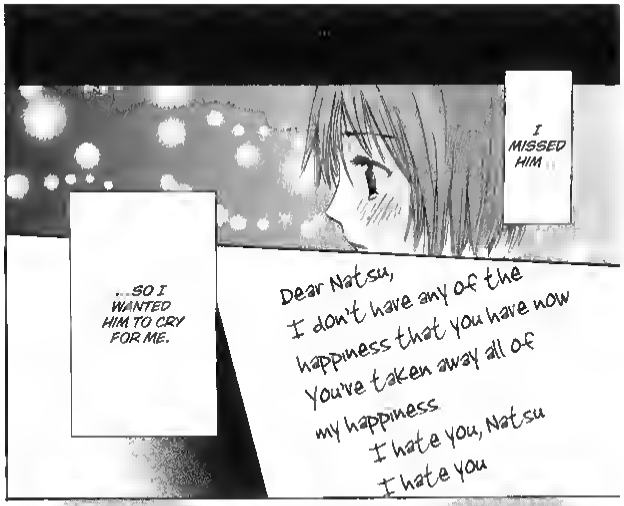
THAT LIAR...
I'VE GOTTEN INTO FIGHTS AT SCHOOL SINCE AS LONG AS I CAN REMEMBER.

I FOUGHT EVERY BOY THAT TEASED ME ABOUT HOW MY MOTHER'D LEFT ME.
THAT'S WHEN I STARTED TO LOSE MY SELF-CONFIDENCE.

I STOPPED INTERACTING WITH PEOPLE.
I DIDN'T KNOW WHO I COULD TRUST ANYMORE.
BUT I WAS ALL RIGHT WITH THAT.
I WAS JUST HAPPY I COULD TRUST GRANNY AND TARO AND NATSU.
AS LONG AS I HAD NATSU, I WAS FINE.
We'll always be friends, even if we're apart!
Write me letters!

I LOVED NATSU.
I LOVED HIM.
...MORE THAN ANYTHING.
IF EVERYONE REALLY LOVED EACH OTHER..
...WOULD THE KILLING REALLY END?
MAYBE IT'S TIME I APOLOGIZED IN PERSON.
AFTER ALL, WE'VE FINALLY BEEN REUNITED.

I'LL APOLOGIZE TO HIM TONIGHT
THAT SETTLES IT.

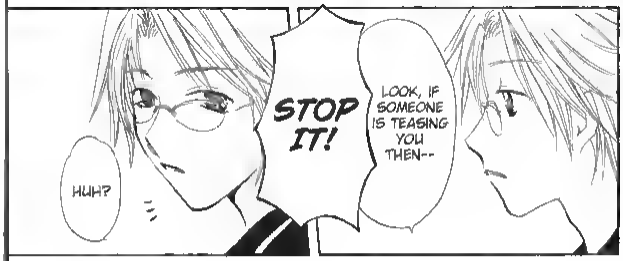

I MISSED HIM...
...SO I WANTED HIM TO CRY FOR ME.
Dear Natsu,
I don't have any of the happiness that you have now
You've taken away all of my happiness
I hate you, Natsu
I hate you

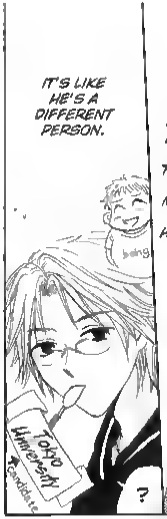
AND BECAUSE I WAS SELFISH, I ENDED UP HURTING HIM
I WAS SO FOOLISH I ALWAYS ASSUMED THAT NATSU FELT THE SAME WAY I DID.
RIGHT AFTER THAT, I SENT A LETTER OF APOLOGY. BUT HE NEVER WROTE BACK TO ME AGAIN.
CAN LOVE REALLY SAVE THE WORLD?

I WENT TO YOUR CLASSROOM DURING LUNCH
...AND YOUR CLASSMATES SAID YOU ALWAYS GO OFF SOMEWHERE TO EAT LUNCH BY YOURSELF

DO YOU ALWAYS EAT LUNCH ALONE?

WHY IS THAT?
ARE YOU ALWAYS ALONE?
BLUSH

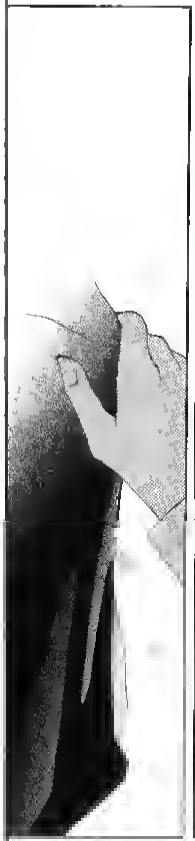

HUH?
STOP IT!
LOOK, IF SOMEONE IS TEASING YOU THEN--

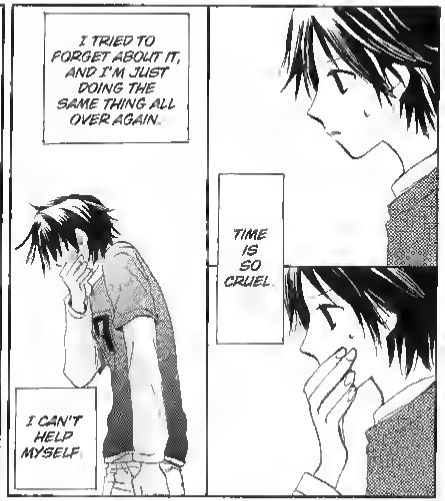

IT'S LIKE HE'S A DIFFERENT PERSON.
Tokyo University
?

DARN IT! THERE'S JUST TOO BIG A GAP BETWEEN THE NATSU OF MY MEMORIES AND HOW HE IS NOW
UH... H-HOW DO I START...?
WHAT?

I GUESS EVEN YOU CAN SMILE EVERY ONCE IN A WHILE, HUH?
UH, YEAH..
AND YOU WERE LAUGHING!
AHA HA HAA
I WAS SURPRISED TO SEE YOU'RE ALREADY MAKING FRIENDS!
Oh yeah!
I SAW YOU DURING LUNCH TODAY!

BY THE WAY, KAJITSU...
OH..
I JUST DON'T LIKE STANDING OUT, THAT'S ALL.
I'D DRAW TOO MUCH ATTENTION IF I DIDN'T SMILE AROUND PEOPLE
SURE, I CAN SMILE.




I TRIED TO FORGET ABOUT IT, AND I'M JUST DOING THE SAME THING ALL OVER AGAIN.
TIME IS SO CRUEL.
I CAN'T HELP MYSELF.

YOU'RE WRONG.
I'M NOT TRYING TO PRY.
JUST RELAX, OKAY?

...BUT I DON'T NEED YOU PRYING INTO MY BUSINESS!
YOU DON'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT ME!
...OR BE ABLE TO FIT INTO THE COOL GROUPS LIKE YOU...
OKAY, SO I MIGHT NOT BE AS SMART AS YOU...
I CAN'T STOP MYSELF.
...OR BE GOOD AT COOKING LIKE YOU...
DAMN IT, I'M LOSING MY TEMPER AGAIN!
STOP IT! I DON'T NEED YOU WORRYING ABOUT ME!
YOU'RE THE ONE WHO JUST CHANGED SCHOOLS!

NATSU... I HATE--

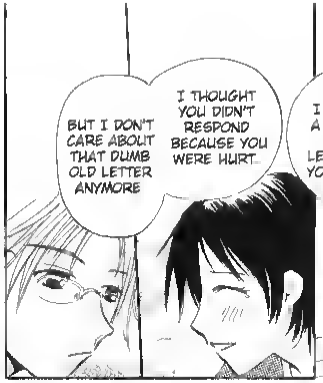
I hate you, Natsu!

I'M SORRY!
NO, I REALLY WANT TO APOLOGIZE FOR THAT!
HUH...?
Bow of Apology
YOU.
YOU DIDN'T READ THEM?
AH!
wobble wobble
KA--
KAJI-TSU!?
HUH...?
I WAS IN SIXTH GRADE AT THE TIME, SO I SORT OF GOT TEASED FOR WRITING LETTERS TO A GIRL.
SORRY FOR BEING SUCH A JERK.
I ACTUALLY STOPPED READING YOUR LETTERS AFTER THAT, EVEN THOUGH I WAS THE ONE WHO SUGGESTED IT IN THE FIRST PLACE.

TUG
WHAT IS IT?
I'M JUST NOT GOOD AT EXPRESSING MYSELF, OKAY?
JUST LIKE IN THE LETTERS!
I'M SORRY! THAT ISN'T WHAT I MEANT TO SAY!
I'M SORRY!
I WON'T RUN AWAY
LETTERS?
I'M SORRY THAT I STOPPED WRITING BACK AFTER A WHILE
ABOUT THAT TOO, KAJITSU.
I'VE BEEN MEANING TO APOLOGIZE
YOU MEAN, FROM WHEN WE WERE KIDS?
HERE IT COMES!
I PROMISED MYSELF I WOULDN'T RUN AWAY

NO. IT'S A GOOD THING.
I KINDA LIKE IT.
OH, NO, NO, NO! I DIDN'T MEAN IT ANYWAY, SO WHAT DOES IT MATTER?
WHAT DID YOU WRITE IN IT?
NO!
WHAT THE--!? WELL, SORRY!!
Leave me alone!
FOR A MOMENT THERE, I ALMOST THOUGHT YOU HAD A CUTE SIDE

YOU ACTUALLY SMILED!
THIS IS THE FIRST TIME YOU'VE SMILED IN THE HOUSE!
OOH!
WH-WHAT!?
!?
SQUISH
OH MY GOD!


BUT I DON'T CARE ABOUT THAT DUMB OLD LETTER ANYMORE
I THOUGHT YOU DIDN'T RESPOND BECAUSE YOU WERE HURT...
SEE, I WROTE A REALLY NASTY LETTER TO YOU ONCE.
HUH?
I'M OKAY
IN FACT, I'M RELIEVED

... YOU'RE DOING FINE THAT'S ALL THAT MATTERS.
AS LONG AS...

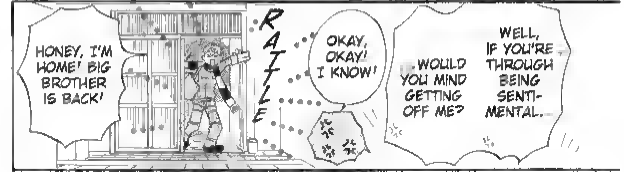
I'M SO GLAD...

EEK!
UH...
GLASSES

W-WELCOME HOME..
TARO!
THIS HAS TO BE A NIGHT-MARE...
Mechanical movement

I THINK I'LL START WRITING IN MY DIARY AGAIN STARTING TODAY
CALM DOWN! IT WAS A MIS-UNDER-STANDING!
ALL I WANT IS SOME PEACE AND QUIET!
THAT'S IT! NEW RULE! NO INCEST IN THE HOUSE!
ARGH! I GO AWAY FOR THREE DAYS AND YOU TWO GET ALL HOT AND HEAVY!?
KA—BOOM

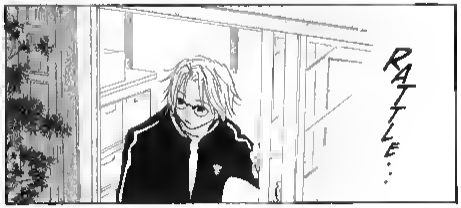
NATSU, YOU'RE JUST SO LIKE HOW YOU USED TO BE! ♡
NICE! ♡
TEE HEE HEE HEE
OOPS!
My bad!
ROLL
SHOVE
I'M FINE.
BUT ARE YOU SURE YOU'RE OKAY, KAJITSU?
And would you stop blushing so much?
FLOP
OOPS...
SORRY...
I didn't mean anything bad by it!


HONEY, I'M HOME! BIG BROTHER IS BACK!
RATTLE
OKAY, OKAY! I KNOW!
WOULD YOU MIND GETTING OFF ME?
WELL, IF YOU'RE THROUGH BEING SENTI-MENTAL...

NOW THE HOUSE WILL NEVER BE EMPTY! I SAY WE ALL GET DOWN AS A FAMILY AND CELEBRATE!
GOOD NEWS! I QUIT MY JOB AS A TRUCK DRIVER SO THAT I CAN WORK CLOSER TO HOME AS A DELIVERYMAN!

Dear Natsu,
I don't have any of the happiness that you have now. You've taken away all of my happiness.
I hate you Natsu.
I hate you
click
click
crackle
crackle
crackle
rustle
rustle
"AS LONG AS YOU'RE DOING FINE, THAT'S ALL THAT MATTERS."
"I DON'T CARE ABOUT THAT DUMB OLD LETTER ANYMORE."

I'M SO HAPPY..
..I WAS FINALLY ABLE TO SEE YOU AGAIN.
THERE'S SO MUCH I WANT TO TELL NATSU NOW
Tara scolded us for three whole hours! stagger
HM?
DEAR NATSU
Practicing Smiling
CHEESE!
HOW ARE YOU DOING?

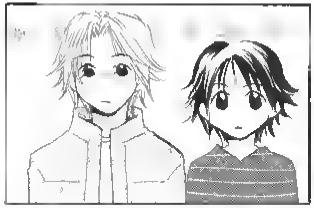

RATTLE...

#5 No Incest Allowed!

* No Incest Allowed In the House

crossroad

Chapter 5: No Incest Allowed!



Part 5

In order to write the calligraphy on the title page, I dug up an old calligraphy dictionary from a former teacher of mine who's since passed away. It's been ten years since he died, and I can still smell him (even though I've never touched him) All we did was fight when he was around, I really didn't like hearing myself say "Ah, he was a good guy," just because he was dead. So instead, I wrote some funny stories about the bad things he did, and when I realized that I missed his smell, my heart suddenly hurt with the pain of love and loss. The death of someone close to you doesn't just affect you on the surface--it seeps down into your deepest depths

PING!
PING!
I'M NOT TAKING MY EYES OFF YOU TWO...
TURN
TARO'S SENSORS WILL GO OFF AGAIN
Oop! We're too late!

YEAH, YEAH WE GET IT...
Fed Up!
AS HEAD OF THIS HOUSEHOLD, I AM NOT ABOUT TO LET EITHER OF YOU THREATEN THE SANCTITY OF MY FAMILY!
A SIMPLE "YES, SIR!" WILL SUFFICE!
SAY IT LIKE YOU MEAN IT!
YESSS SIRRR
King

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED!
Poof!
PHEW!
CHUGA
CHUGA

PFT! LIKE I'D EVER DO THAT WITH KAJITSU!
WE'RE NOT IN THAT SORT OF RELATIONSHIP AT ALL!
No Incest Allowed !!!
SLAP
SLAP
THIS SIGN REFERS TO YOU TWO!
AM I MAKING MYSELF CLEAR, NATSU? KAJITSU?
BUT I ALREADY TOLD YOU, IT'S ALL A MISUNDERSTANDING

WOULD YOU STOP RUSHING TO CONCLUSIONS? IF YOU'RE NOT CAREFUL
YOU SAYING I'M NOT GOOD ENOUGH !?
twingle

HWOOOOOO
TODA FAMILY
TARO KAJITSU NATSU SATSUKI
HMPH!
YOU'RE SCARING ME ENOUGH AS IT IS! I'LL DO MY CLOTHES LATER!
And hang them to dry in my room.
pout
pout
pout
For a guy, he sure is girlish about his clothes!
THIS IS...
...TODA-SAN'S PARENTS' HOME!
Um... No it's not
IN MY LEFT HAND I HOLD THE LOVE LETTER I WROTE TO TODA-SAN LATE LAST NIGHT
Squeeze
NOW, SOME OF YOU MIGHT BE ASKING YOURSELVES, "WHY ON EARTH WOULD HE GIVE IT TO HER SO EARLY IN THE DAY?"
WELL, THAT'S BECAUSE I'VE FIGURED OUT A MASTER PLAN!
I GIVE IT TO HER IN THE MORNING (SHE'S A LITTLE SURPRISED)
SHE'S TOO BUSY TO READ IT SO SHE READS IT AT SCHOOL (HER SECOND SURPRISE)
SHE THINKS IT OVER AND GIVES ME A RESPONSE BY LUNCH (SURPRISE NUMBER THREE!)

OH... UH-OH
YOU GOT SOME THINGS FOR THE WASH?
There's still room.
I JUST STARTED THIS LOAD. YOU CAN PUT YOURS IN.
UH, THAT'S OKAY. I'LL DO MINE BY MY-SELF.
AW, HE'S SHY! ♡
WONDER WHAT KIND OF UNDER-WEAR HE HAS...
I'M NOT SHY!
I JUST DON'T LIKE PEOPLE HANDLING MY STUFF. THAT'S ALL!
WHAT THE HECK!?
YOU COULD AT LEAST LET ME SEE YOUR UNDIES!
WHY THE HELL WOULD I EVER LET YOU SEE MY UNDIES!?

WHO THE HELL ARE YOU!?

HUH?

MY PLAN HAS HIT A SNAG!

UH... WHO ARE YOU?

Hi-ya!

I AM TODA-SAN--TARO TODA! YOU GOT A PROBLEM WITH THAT!?

UH, NO IT'S NOT FOR YOU! IT'S FOR TODA-SAN!

WHAT IS THIS? "TO MY DEAREST TODA-SAN" ...?

WHO IS IT, TARO? ANOTHER SALES-MAN?

ER, NO--

WHY'S HE SO ANGRY?

Devil Kid!

Oh no! Oh no!

Rustle rustle

TMP TMP TMP

COMING!

IT'S TODA-SAN'S VOICE!

IN MY LEFT HAND, I HOLD MY LOVE LETTER TO HER...

AND WITH MY RIGHT...

Ding Dong

RATTLE

THIS IS THE DAY I'LL FINALLY TELL HER HOW I FEEL!

IT'S ALMOST TOO PER-FECT.

THIS WAY SHE'LL HAVE THREE SURPRISES INSTEAD OF ONE!

AND NO DOUBT THE MEMORIES SHE'S ABOUT TO FORM WILL STICK WITH HER FOR ETERNITY, DEEPLY ENGRAVED INTO HER HEART!

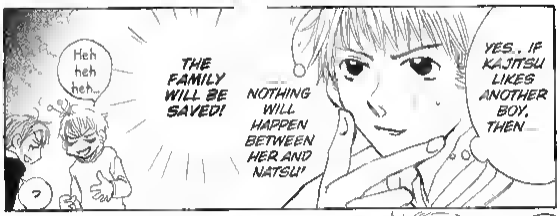
PLEASE ACCEPT THIS LETTER!

TODA-SAN!

HELL NO!!
Too close for comfort!
K.O
nuzzle
nuzzle
nuzzle
CAN I CALL YOU BROTHER-IN-LAW!?

SLAM!
NOW YOU TWO GO ON AND HAVE A NICE TIME!
?
FORGET ABOUT THAT!
I'LL TAKE CARE OF IT!
W-WAIT A MINUTE! I'M TRYING TO HANG THE LAUNDRY HERE!
KAJITSU!
HEY, KAJITSU!
Phew!
YEAH?

STOP
WAIT A MINUTE.
?
YOU THINK I'D HAND OVER MY INNOCENT LITTLE SISTER TO THE LIKES OF YOU!?
WHAT!? YOU'RE TRYING TO GET ALL LOVEY-DOVEY WITH MY KAJITSU!?
I'M SORRY! I'M SORRY!
RIP
TODA FAMILY
TARO KAJITSU
NATSU
AN OLDER BROTHER? HE MUST BE ONE OF THE NAMES ON THE NAME-PLATE.


Heh heh heh...
?
THE FAMILY WILL BE SAVED!
NOTHING WILL HAPPEN BETWEEN HER AND NATSU!
YES... IF KAJITSU LIKES ANOTHER BOY, THEN...

...I LIKE THIS TURN OF EVENTS!
I'M NOT SURE WHAT'S GOING ON HERE, BUT...
UM...
HUH!?
Where did THAT come from!?
I GLADLY GRANT YOU PERMISSION TO COURT MY LITTLE SISTER.
PLEASE TAKE GOOD CARE OF HER!

IT'S CLASS 3
WELL, MY CLASSROOM IS OVER THIS WAY
Guess I'll be seeing you, uh... Tokihito-kun.
RIGHT!
IF YOU EVER HAVE ANY PROBLEMS, DON'T HESITATE TO CALL ME, 'KAY?
I DIDN'T KNOW SHE HAD ONE.
OH?
UH-HUH! WITH HER BOY-FRIEND!!
STOMP
STOMP
STOMP
I'm sleepy
YUP! SHE JUST GOT ONE. HEH HEH HEH.
?
?
?
?
NYUCK NYUCK NYUCK NYUCK!
WHAT'S WITH HIM?
Oni-chan! That
PLEASE FEEL FREE TO CALL ME TOKIHITO
I'M TOKIHITO IMANAKAJIMA, FROM CLASS 1!
I...
?
?
WHAT WAS THAT ALL ABOUT?
Slide
WH..
SHALL WE START HEADING TO SCHOOL, KAJITSU-SAN?
OH, YES.
MY FAMILY GOES WAY BACK
IMANAKAJIMA, HUH? THAT'S THE SAME NAME AS THE NEXT TOWN OVER.
HUH?
KAJITSU'S ALREADY LEFT FOR SCHOOL?
WHY AM I WALKING TO SCHOOL WITH THIS GUY?
YOU THINK? IT SEEMS THE SAME AS YESTERDAY TO ME
WHAT LOVELY WEATHER WE'RE HAVING TODAY!
THIS IS BETTER THAN MY PLAN! ♡

1-1
WONDER IF HE'S IN...?
shoop
NATSU-KUN! YOU CAN HAVE MY FRIED CHICKEN! ♡
DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT! ♡
Tee hee!
kyaa!
HOME COOKING'S ALWAYS THE BEST!
HERE! TRY MY OMELET! ♡
Tee hee!
Tee hee!
I WAS PLANNING ON BUYING SOMETHING, SO NO THANKS
No fair!
I WANT NATSU-KUN TO EAT MINE, TOO! ♡
COME ON! WITHOUT PARENTS TO COOK FOR YOU, YOU MUST NOT BE EATING PROPERLY!
You poor thing!
Back away

OH! AND...
I'LL BE COMING BY AT LUNCH TO PICK YOU UP!
YOU'LL WHAT!?
SEE YOU LATER, THEN!
HUH!?
UH, WAIT A SEC--
JUST...
WHO WAS THAT BOY?
HE DIDN'T SEEM LIKE A BAD GUY, BUT...
Then at lunch
WHAT THE!? HE PUT NATSU'S LUNCH TOGETHER WITH MINE!
DAMN YOU, TARO!
I thought it felt heavy...
Off you
Scene from that Morning

I PREFER TO BE ALONE
I DON'T DO THAT SORT OF THING
NO THANKS
IT'S SO NICE OUT TODAY, WHY DON'T WE EAT LUNCH TOGETHER OUTSIDE IN THE GARDEN?
TODAY'S GOTTA BE THE BEST DAY OF MY LIFE!

HEY, I SAID NO--
HUH?
YOU GO ON AHEAD, AND I'LL BUY US SOME TEA!
HEY, LOOK! THERE'S A BENCH OPEN! HOW LUCKY CAN WE GET!?

DAMN HIM!
YOU HEAR ME? I'M NOT...!
I SAID I'M NOT GOING!
BACK IN A FLASH!

TUP TUP TUP
I WAS JUST ABOUT TO HEAD OVER TO YOUR CLASSROOM!

glare

HUH?

OH! KAJITSU-CHAN! THERE YOU ARE!
WE'RE EATING JUST FINE!
Grr~~!

DON'T TAKE IT PERSON-ALLY.
OH... OH MY! I'M SPEECHLESS! I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY!!
SOB

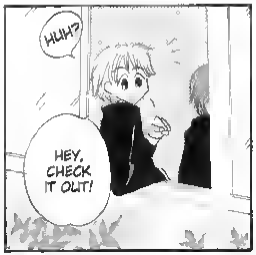
I DON'T WANT IT ANY-WAY.
YOU CAN HAVE IT.
HUH !? A BENTO LUNCH !?
HERE.
PLOP

YEAH, YOU'RE RIGHT
ISN'T IT THAT FEUDAL LORD KID?
WHO'S THAT GUY SHE'S WITH?
HA HA HA

Shoop
WHOA!

IMANA-KAJIMA, FROM OUR CLASS.
What do you mean by "it"?
Take it!
Well done! Take your award!
FEUDAL LORD?

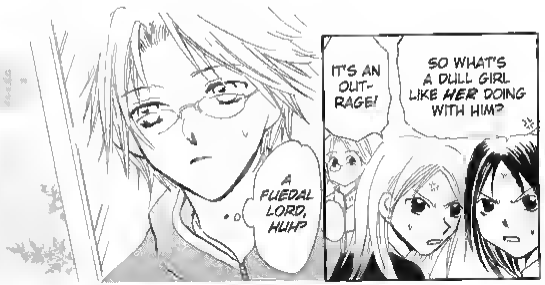
Your cooking is the best!
Really?
THE NAME "IMANA-KAJIMA" IS FAMOUS AROUND HERE!
LONG AGO, HIS FAMILY OWNED ALL THE LAND IN THIS AREA. THEY EVEN HAD A TOWN AND SOME TEMPLES NAMED AFTER THEM.
Not to mention shopping districts and streets.

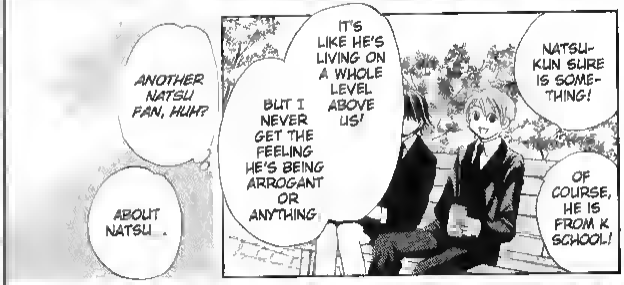

HUH?
HEY, CHECK IT OUT!

PEEK!
THAT'S NATSU'S BIG SIS
SHE'S HAVING LUNCH WITH SOME GUY IN THE GARDEN!

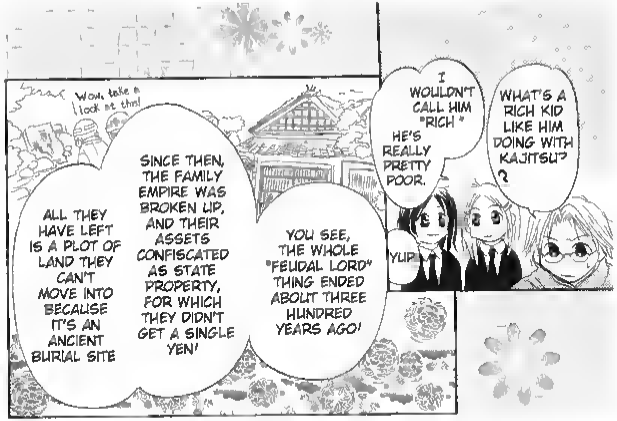
DARN IT!
TURN!

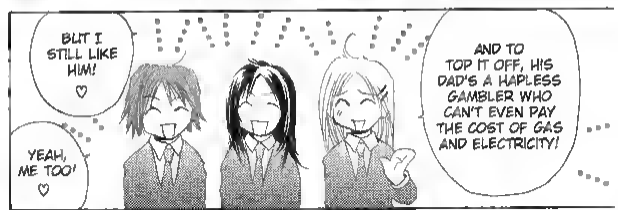
WHO WOULD HAVE GUESSED SHE HAD A BOYFRIEND?
YOU MEAN THE ICE QUEEN?


A FUEDAL LORD, HUH?
IT'S AN OUT-RAGE!
SO WHAT'S A DULL GIRL LIKE HER DOING WITH HIM?


ANOTHER NATSU FAN, HUH?
ABOUT NATSU...
BUT I NEVER GET THE FEELING HE'S BEING ARROGANT OR ANYTHING
IT'S LIKE HE'S LIVING ON A WHOLE LEVEL ABOVE US!
NATSU-KUN SURE IS SOME-THING!
OF COURSE, HE IS FROM K SCHOOL!

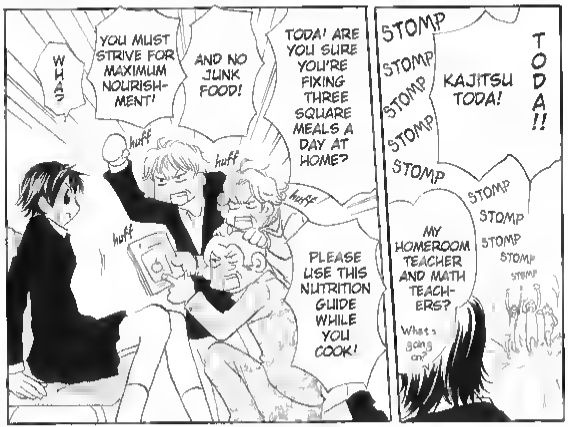
HE NEVER GETS INTO FIGHTS, AND HE FITS NATURALLY INTO GROUPS
HE'S DAMN WELL CLOSE TO PERFECT
HE REALLY CAN DO ANYTHING
STUDY, COOK, CLEAN, LAUNDRY... THERE'S NOTHING HE C IN'T DO.


Wow, take a look at this!
ALL THEY HAVE LEFT IS A PLOT OF LAND THEY CAN'T MOVE INTO BECAUSE IT'S AN ANCIENT BURIAL SITE
SINCE THEN, THE FAMILY EMPIRE WAS BROKEN UP, AND THEIR ASSETS CONFISCATED AS STATE PROPERTY, FOR WHICH THEY DIDN'T GET A SINGLE YEN!
YOU SEE, THE WHOLE "FEUDAL LORD" THING ENDED ABOUT THREE HUNDRED YEARS AGO!
I WOULDN'T CALL HIM "RICH." HE'S REALLY PRETTY POOR.
WHAT'S A RICH KID LIKE HIM DOING WITH KAJITSU?
YUP.


BUT I STILL LIKE HIM! ♡
YEAH, ME TOO! ♡
AND TO TOP IT OFF, HIS DAD'S A HAPLESS GAMBLER WHO CAN'T EVEN PAY THE COST OF GAS AND ELECTRICITY!

I FEEL ALL FLOATY JUST LOOKING AT HIM! ♡
HE'S ALWAYS SO POSITIVE NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS! ♡
HE HAS SUCH A LOVELY SMILE!

YOUR LUNCH WAS JUST DELICIOUS! I'M IN HEAVEN! ♡
EH?
KAJITSU-SAN, YOU'RE TOO KIND!
W-WOULD YOU STOP GOING ON ABOUT THAT?
HEH HEH!


WHA?
YOU MUST STRIVE FOR MAXIMUM NOURISHMENT!
AND NO JUNK FOOD!
TODA! ARE YOU SURE YOU'RE FIXING THREE SQUARE MEALS A DAY AT HOME?
huff
huff
huff
huff
PLEASE USE THIS NUTRITION GUIDE WHILE YOU COOK!
STOMP
STOMP
STOMP
STOMP
STOMP
KAJITSU TODA!
TODA!!
STOMP
STOMP
STOMP
STOMP
STOMP
MY HOMEROOM TEACHER AND MATH TEACHERS?
What's going on?

I FEEL LIKE AN UTTER FAILURE NEXT TO HIM EVEN THOUGH WE'RE THE SAME AGE
I KNOW I SHOULD BE HAPPY FOR HIM, BUT HE JUST GIVES ME A MAJOR INFERIORITY COMPLEX

STAND
THIS LUNCH IS THE BEST I'VE EVER HAD!
AND, WELL, LOOK--
TH-THAT'S NOT TRUE!
Blush
WHAT AM I DOING? I JUST MET THIS GUY AND I'M BLABBING EVERYTHING!

I don't know what to say about your bills, though...
DON'T WORRY YOU'RE STILL JUST A FIRST YEAR. YOU'VE STILL GOT PLENTY OF TIME TO GROW
YOU'RE WORRIED ABOUT YOUR HEIGHT?
...I'M STILL GRABBING LIFE BY THE HORNS!
AND I MAY NOT ALWAYS HAVE MONEY TO PAY THE BILLS, BUT...
Eh heh!
I MAY BE SMALL
AND I MAY BE MISTAKEN FOR A GIRL ALL THE TIME, DESPITE BEING 16...

I'M SORRY, TOKIHITO-KUN, BUT COULD YOU STEP SIDE FOR A MOMENT?
BUT... IT'S NO GOOD! I CAN'T TAKE IT ANY-MORE!
HUH?
..BUT THERE'S NO WAY IN HELL I'M DOING THAT %$! &#, YOU *%$! @ING &@#%S!
DO YOU HEAR US, TODA!?
WH-WHAT ARE YOU DOING!?
YEAH, I HEARD YOU...
A'EEEEEE!
Put that thing down!
GRIT!

NOT YOU! WE'RE WORRIED ABOUT NATSU!!
NA...
NATSU?
I'M NOT ANEMIC OR ANY-THING--
I'M SURE MY EATING IS JUST FINE
A GREAT MIND STARTS WITH GREAT FOOD!
AND ACCORDING TO RUMOR, YOUR LUNCHES ARE THE WORST!
SPARKLE
SPARKLE
SPARKLE
IF YOU EVER SKIP A MEAL, GIVE IT TO YOUR LITTLE BROTHER!
HE'S THE MOST OUTSTANDING STUDENT WE'VE EVER HAD! HE'S OUR STAR OF HOPE!
YES! WITH A REAL TOKYO UNIVERSITY CANDIDATE RIGHT HERE IN OUR OWN SCHOOL, ALL BETS ARE BEING PLACED ON HIM!

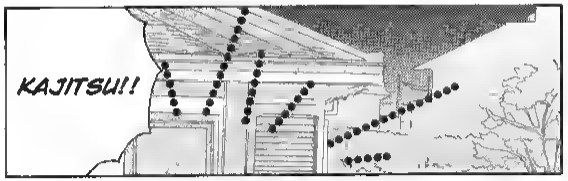
AW, CRAP. I'M LOSING IT AGAIN! AND JUST WHEN I THOUGHT I'D FINALLY MADE A FRIEND!
UH.. KAJITSU-SAN?
ARE YOUR TEACHERS ALWAYS LIKE THIS?
YOU ARE OFFICIALLY HIS SLAVE UNTIL HE GETS ACCEPTED INTO TOKYO U!
AND BE SURE NOT TO DO ANYTHING THAT WOULD GET IN THE WAY OF HIS STUDYING!

ONCE YOU TRY IT...
...IT REALLY IS FUN!
HUH?
I'M SUCH AN AWFUL PERSON! I'M ALWAYS LOSING MY TEMPER!
THWACK!
OOF!
I MUST'VE BEEN BORN UNDER AN UNLUCKY STAR.
YOU ALMOST KILLED US!
WHAT ARE YOU DOING!?
YOU'RE RIGHT!
ARGH, MY BACK!

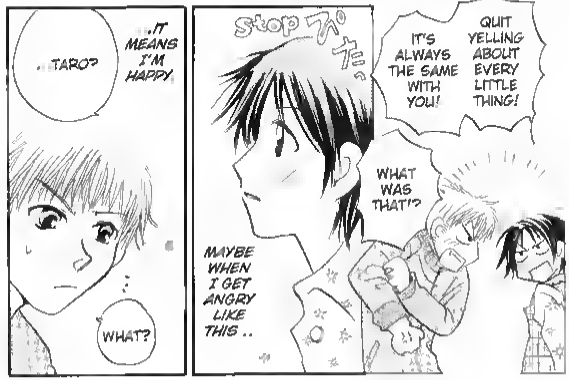
CRASH!
どしーん
EEK!
NOW I'LL NEVER BE NORMAL!
ARGH!
OH NO!
I REALLY DID IT THIS TIME!
YOU'RE GONNA BE THE SLAVES AROUND HERE!
If you're so concerned make him dinner yourself!
AT LEAST
I FELT NORMAL, IF ONLY FOR A BRIEF MOMENT.
...MY FIRST AND ONLY FRIEND.
FAREWELL...

I WONDER WHY..?

THIS IS THE FIRST TIME I'VE FELT LIKE I REALLY HAD A FRIEND AT SCHOOL.

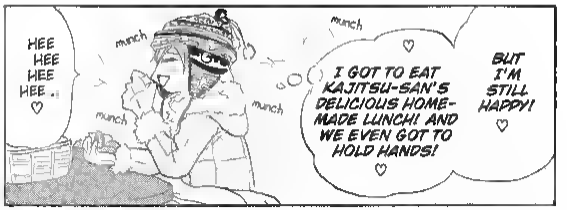

KAJITSU!!

DON'T YOU HAVE ANY RESPECT FOR YOUR BIG BROTHER!?
WOULD YOU DROP IT ALREADY!?
SNAP
OH, I'M SORRY. I WAS TOO BUSY MAKING DINNER
NAG
NAG
ALL I ASK FOR IS A HOT BATH AFTER A LONG DAY'S WORK!
I THOUGHT I TOLD YOU TO CLEAN THE BATH!
NAG
NAG


..TARO?
..IT MEANS I'M HAPPY.
WHAT?
stop
IT'S ALWAYS THE SAME WITH YOU!
QUIT YELLING ABOUT EVERY LITTLE THING!
WHAT WAS THAT!?
MAYBE WHEN I GET ANGRY LIKE THIS ..

I BET WE'LL BE THE BEST OF FRIENDS.
HE MADE ME FEEL SO CALM.
MAYBE IT'S BECAUSE HE REMINDED ME OF HOW NATSU USED TO BE.
You're pretty strong Kajitsu-san
Ha ha ha! Same to you Tokihito-kun!
Oh, how sweet youth is
Reminds me of when I was young
The teachers are still pinned under the bench.
I GET THE FEELING I'LL BE A GENTLER PERSON FROM NOW ON.

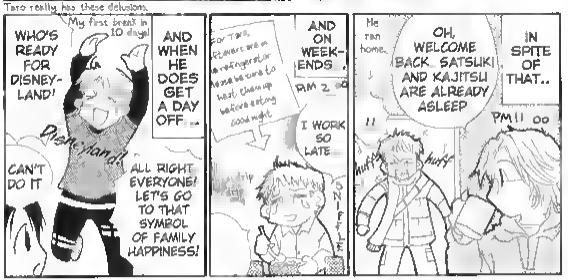
"NO INCEST ALLOWED IN THE HOUSE!"
RIGHT?
THIS
...MUST BE A NIGHT-MARE!
KAJITSU, YOU SNEAK!
YES! SCORE ONE FOR ME!
Revenge is sweet
BOY, IT'S COLD
THEY TURNED OFF THE POWER AGAIN
←Tokihito-Yun
ALL MY MIKAN ARE FROZEN
GRIN
I FEEL...
...SO INCREDIBLY HAPPY RIGHT NOW!
TEE HEE!
EEK!!
She's smiling!
GLOMP
?
SOMETHING'S WRONG WITH KAJITSU! SHE'S PLANNING SOMETHING! I KNOW IT!
WAAAH!!
ALL RIGHT, ALREADY NOW WOULD YOU PLEASE STOP CRYING ALL OVER MY CHEST?
It's making me queasy
HEY!
SATSUKI, GO UP TO THEM.
...AND SAY
psf
psf
OKAY!
Got it!
TARO-NII
She means Taro-nii-chan
tup tup tup



End of Crossroad Vol. 1

Bonus Comic 2: Brotherly Love

Taro really has these delusions.



In Volume 2 of

crossroad

Experience the taste...

BE CAREFUL WHO YOU TRUST.

-TODA-SAN

...of forbidden fruit.

Crossroad Volume 2
On Sale February 2004!

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Shioko Mizuki SALT & PEPPER (Sort of like an afterword)

This is the last and final page! Thank you all so very much for reading all this way! The story and characters are still all underdeveloped, but I plan on working my hardest until I die!! Hope we have a great time from now on! Thank you... Thank you... STOP

CROSSROAD is on its way to unfolding into a love comedy, but I feel like the book is still only halfway finished. Still going in circles here. I'll do my best for the remaining half. Who knows—this might be my final work! And that's why I plan on moving forth with a fighting spirit! So once volume two comes out, be sure to buy it! If it comes out... If it comes out...out... STOP

Well, anyways, thank you!
I pray that we'll meet again!

2003 4.22

special thanks to
Kiya-san, Akane-san,
Amen-chan (my support)
My editor, my family,
my dog (Mario)
Friends, marketing chief,
and everyone else.

NEXT...
These guys are just prototypes of what's to come! I hope you'll regard them kindly next volume! I'm really having the most fun drawing Kajitsu as she changes and grows.
Tee hee hee

Where's Natsu?

Pg. 131
School terms – In Japanese high schools, the year is broken into three terms. School begins around April 1st, so the Winter term that Kajitsu and Natsu are entering is the final term of this school year.

Pg. 134
Gakuran—Natsu's old school uniform is a *gakuran*, a military-style uniform commonly used in all-boys schools.

Pg. 157
Mikan—Mikan are a Japanese citrus fruit similar in taste and appearance to tangerines. They are in season in fall and winter.

Pg. 166
First Name Basis – It is very unusual to ask someone to address you on a first name basis after a first meeting. That Tokihito would do this so quickly shows just how eager he is to be on casual terms with Kajitsu.

Pg. 175
Feudal Lord – Tokihito is referred to here as "*Tono-sama*." *Tono* is the title used for Feudal Lords, also known as *Daimyo*. These wealthy and powerful landowners ruled Japan at a regional level from the 12th through the 19th centuries. After the Meiji Restoration in the 1860s, the Feudal system was dismantled and the *Daimyo* surrendered their lands to the new government.

Translator's Notes

Pg. 10
Santoka – Santoka is the pen name of Taneda Shoichi (1882-1940). A Zen Buddhist monk as well as a poet, his haiku broke with traditional form but are much loved for their haunting beauty. In life, he was an uncouth character who spent much of his time trekking through the wilderness for weeks on end.

Pg. 37
Yakuza – Basically, the Japanese mafia.

Pg. 75
Sadako – Sadako is the creepy ghost girl from the Japanese horror film *Ringu*. In the American remake, *The Ring*, her character is called Samara.

Pg. 83
Tatami—*Tatami* are the traditional Japanese floor covering. The straw mats are usually 90 cm x 180 cm. A 4-tatami room apartment is a small living space indeed!

Pg. 84
Unit Bathroom – A unit bathroom is a highly compact room with a shower, toilet and sink designed for standardization.

Pg. 92
Hatoyama – Yukio Hatoyama was the leader of Japan's opposition party, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) at the time of writing. Grandson of a popular postwar Prime Minister, Hatoyama is a controversial figure for the way he merged disparate political parties to oppose the incumbent Liberal Democratic Party (LDP).

Pg. 113
Hanamaru – In Japan, getting a *hanamru* (flower mark) is like getting a gold star for good work.

crossroad

Less than siblings, more than friends.

Kajitsu has never known a proper family. Her dad's a deadbeat and her mom changes husbands like most people change socks. Kajitsu isn't alone in her dysfunction--Taro and Natsu, the hottie step brothers she hasn't seen in seven years, are also refugees from negligent parents in search of a home. Abandoned by everyone but each other, the three not-quite-siblings make one last attempt at building a family. It's hard enough getting along in a home with rampant hormones and no adults, but when an unexpected bundle of joy is dropped in their laps, can they learn to be parents, too?

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